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HE FOUND A GREAT CROWD.

[p. 373

NO OTHER WAY

BY

WALTER BESANT

AUTHOR OF

'THE ORANGE GIRL,' 'THE LADY OF LYNN,' ETC.



WITH 12 ILLUSTRATIONS BY CHARLES D. WARD

LONDON
CHATTO & WINDUS

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NO OTHER WAY

CHAPTER I

THE LADY'S DILEMMA

THE lady sat at the open window of her lodging in King Street, Covent Garden. It was a lodging over a print-shop, the sign of which, a Silver Quill, argent on gules, dangled from the front of the house and creaked in the wind. The front-room, where she sat and lived, commanded a fine view of the street; the back-room, in which she slept, overlooked the churchyard of St. Paul's, where funerals all day long inclined the heart to wholesome meditation. Both in the front and at the back there was apparent to the senses the neighbourhood of the market. Since the time was late June and the season was warm and fine, one perceived in the mingled waves of fragrance the crushed strawberry of yesterday, the decayed cherry of last week, the trampled peas, broken lettuce leaves; the pungent spring onion of every day; last year's russets rotten; the cabbage-stalks which lay about in heaps, and all the things which are offered for sale in that great market. It is not, taken altogether, an exhilarating fragrance; but the residents of King Street are accustomed to it; they have it with them all the year round, and at

every season ; they no more complain of it than the people near Billingsgate complain of the smell of fish which hangs for ever in the air.

The lady was a widow—quite a young widow—not more than four-and-twenty ; the weeds which spoke of her condition were modified, so to speak, in such a way as to betoken a widowhood of two years at least ; they signified by their shape, by the manner of wearing them, by some feminine cunning which it would be difficult to explain—yet it was to be discerned—by some artful touch invisible yet perceptible, by the hand which pats the bow and smooths the strings, and introduces some small change into the fall of the drapery, a confession of Christian resignation ; perhaps they signified also—though this the widow would never allow (she was herself unconscious of it : the thing was due to her dressmaker)—the fact that she was at last inclined—the mind sometimes works unconsciously, and, like a watch, is only shown to be at work by the breathing (which in the engine of time is a ticking)—to consider dispassionately and critically, yet with a certain sympathy, any overtures which might be made—should such present themselves—of entering again upon the married state, which is consecrated by Holy Church, yet denounced by poet and satirist as offering fewer prizes than the State Lottery.

This morning, however, her face belied her dress. There was no look of Venus on it ; there was no softness of possible love. Her face, comely and attractive, of the softer kind, with a cheek like a peach, and eyes large, limpid, and full of sunshine, was now disturbed and jangled, like a harpsichord out of tune, with anxiety and doubt. It was full of care, and care had no business with such a face ; it was full of trouble, and trouble was an emotion



THE LADY WAS A WIDOW.

for which that face was not intended by Nature; her lips trembled, and they ought to have smiled; her cheek, which should have remained soft and touched with a tender hue of the wild rose in June, changed colour as her thoughts went wandering here and there, and always came back to the same point, whatever that was; the tears gushed out and rolled down her cheek. Had there been any young man present of reasonable feeling for the sex, he would have cast himself at her feet crying aloud that her face was made for happiness, and that he would himself, at any cost, take upon himself, with no other hope of reward than to see her once more free from trouble, all her cares, her anxieties, and the consequences, if any, of her follies, if there had been follies, or of her misfortunes, if there had been misfortunes.

On her table lay two or three open letters; she glanced at them from time to time, not as if to derive consolation or hope from their utterances, but as if to hear their reproaches, as if she could not choose but look upon them.

The letters were, in truth, accusing voices; they accused the lady, though not in words, of follies and extravagances; they warned her, too late, of what may happen to a woman left early in life without a guide and counsellor: a woman who understands nothing—it is a common failing with women—of the simple rules of compound addition and subtraction, and therefore goes on spending without comprehension of what her expenditure means until the day comes when she finds herself at the end of her fortune, and with no apparent means of paying for her food and dress and lodging. These letters showed her that she was that most unfortunate person, a woman in debt, who cannot pay her debts, or if she pays is left destitute without friends to come to her assistance. The

end of such a woman is clear : she must take shelter in a prison, where in a short time the manners, the language, the dress, the thoughts, of the polite world drop away from her, and like the other residents she becomes plunged in the sink of physical want, physical suffering, and sacrifices all those scruples which, outside, raise men and women to a higher level.

If bitterness and self-reproach and humiliation are wholesome correctives for the soul, even though they come too late to save from open shame, then, indeed, Isabel Weyland this morning was taking a sovereign remedy against I know not how many plaguy disorders and diseases of the soul—such as vanity, self-conceit, complacency, pride of family, pride of rank, the self-respect which is akin to arrogance, and the whole innumerable tribe of impish ailments.

The street below was crowded with people ; all day long and most of the night there is a full and flowing tide of human life flowing up and down the street, which is not, however, one of the most fashionable resorts of London. In the morning, from three o'clock till noon, there are the people of the market—the porters who carry baskets on their heads, the barrows filled with fruit and vegetables, which are carried away to be hawked about the streets of the City and suburbs ; after noon there are the people who walk in the Piazza—a crowd of well-dressed people, yet not like the beaux of the Park ; they are country people, members of Parliament, lawyers, actors of Drury Lane and Covent Garden, poets and wits ; in the evening there are the people who frequent the coffee-houses, the taverns, and the gaming-tables ; later on there are the people who take supper after the play and drink in the night-houses among the ribald company of the place. No sooner have

the rakes gone away to bed than the market people begin again, so that for the whole four-and-twenty hours there is in King Street a continual flocking of folk to Covent Garden, and a continued noise of footsteps, voices, barrows, drays and carts, with the frequent fights of hackney coachmen, chairmen, and the porters of the market.

The lady looked out upon the street. The beaux walked delicately, thin clouded canes hanging from their ruffled wrists; the porters carried baskets of fruit upon their heads, rudely pushing their way within the posts; the street criers, in unending procession, bawled their wares—fruit from the market; fish from Billingsgate; herbs for medicines; laces, gingerbread, needles and pins, matches, rabbits, poultry, baskets, “knives to grind” and “kettles to mend”; hackney-coaches rattled over the stones; the brewer’s dray with the casks of beer dragged heavily, grunting and groaning; ladies with dingle-dangle hoops, fans hanging from their arms, and little caps tied modishly under their chins, slowly walked along to the Piazza, where they would meet their gallants; old gentlemen, their age betrayed by the shaky knees, stopped in front of the print-shops, of which there were many in King Street.

The lady’s Christian name you have heard was Isabel. Her surname was Weyland. She was the widow of the late Honourable Ronald Weyland, only brother of the Earl of Stratherrick in the Scottish Peerage, and one of His Majesty’s High Commissioners for the Hanaper. He died, unfortunately for his wife, when still no more than six-and-twenty. This bereavement fell upon her three years before the morning when we find her in King Street. She had been living the life of a lady of quality and fortune, without sufficient means, and her present difficulties were the result.

She looked down upon the dear delightful epitome of the town; she looked, but she paid small attention. If she noticed the moving panorama at all, it was only to ask herself, with a sinking heart, how long it would be before the sight of this free and cheerful life, this contemplation of the world in action, which fills the young with longing, inspires manhood, and makes old age forget its cares, would be finally closed to her by the shutting of a door. In imagination she heard the slam, and the turning of a key in a lock; in her mind she heard its harsh grating. The thought of this possibility transformed the crowd below her; they were no longer common people, pretenders of fashion, demireps: they became glorified, happy beyond all expression, enviable beyond all words. Truth to say, the current of life in King Street is a turbid stream at best; there are dens and purlieus about Covent Garden of which men do not speak to women, which women, even with other women, profess not to know either by name or by reputation. But to Isabel this morning the street became a sparkling brook, bright and transparent, prattling over pebbles, in comparison with the murky stagnation of the prison which awaited her.

For, indeed, the time had at last arrived—the time certain to arrive for those who live beyond their means—when the catchpole threatens, and the bailiff murmurs, and the creditor, a truculent and relentless person, holds out his hand, and says: ‘Pay me; I will wait no longer—pay me, or else——’

‘Oh,’ she groaned, ‘I have been a fool! Heavens! *what* a fool I have been!’

She had indeed. Yet, at such a crisis in her affairs, self-reproach helped her not. A way had to be found—some way, any way, of borrowing, of raising money, of

prolonging credit ; some way, else her creditors—— She shuddered and trembled.

She might write to them ; she might call upon them and plead with them. If they would forbear, she would pay, perhaps, at some future time, but she had no security to offer. If they would not forbear, if they took such revenge as was in their power, she would never be able to pay them. Alas ! she was herself the daughter of a City merchant ; she knew what was thought and said of the debtor who would not or could not pay his debts ; she knew the rage, the thirst for revenge, that fills the breast of the tradesman who finds that he has made a bad debt.

Why, his business, his profits, his livelihood—all depend upon the payment of debts ; nothing can be invented or allowed by the law which can be too bad for the defaulting debtor ; the prisons are full of poor wretches who would pay if they could, but, being locked-up and forbidden to work, cannot pay. She knew that an appeal to the mercy of her creditors would only harden their hearts, while it would only humiliate her with no result.

She thought of flight—but whither ? And when her slender stock was gone, what should she do next ?

And again she clasped her hands and wailed : ‘ Alas ! I have been a fool—a fool ! *What* a fool I have been !’

She took up one of the letters and read it again, although she knew it by heart. It was from a draper on Ludgate Hill. ‘ Why,’ she moaned, ‘ I have been a customer of the man ever since I married. Yet he threatens me !’ It was true that she had ordered many things of him and had paid for most ; but, then, she had not paid for the last things, which were costly. And now he had written to her with words unmistakable.

‘MADAM,

‘I beg respectfully to call your immediate attention to the very large account now standing unpaid in my book. I find that it is now nothing less than £95 5s. 11d. I must therefore most reluctantly request you to discharge this debt at once. I cannot believe that the widow of the late Hon. Ronald Weyland and the sister-in-law of Lord Stratherrick is unable to pay a bill of £95 only. Indeed, my own position forbids me to wait. I have, therefore, to inform you that if within four-and-twenty hours I do not receive the money in full, I must take the usual steps and issue a writ. In that case the money must be paid in full with costs and immediately. If it is not paid, I shall have to instruct my attorney to proceed as the law permits and directs.

‘Madam, I cannot believe that a lady who has dealt with me for so long, and until this year with no difficulty about payment, will fail to meet her just liabilities. I could in ordinary circumstances wait your pleasure, but at the present moment my position is serious, and I know not what may happen to me unless this money is paid.

‘I have the honour to remain, madam,

‘Your most obedient and humble servant,

‘JOSEPH FULTON.’

When she had read this letter through for the tenth time, she laid it down upon the table, and, with her chin in her hand, she fell into another meditation of a most unpleasing nature.

She was interrupted by the servant of the house, who came to tell her that Mr. Fulton was below, and begged the honour of speech with her.

The writer of the letter followed the maid upstairs, and

entered without further ceremony. He was a man of short stature and of appearance displeasing. Although he was dressed as a citizen of substance and position, with silver buttons to his coat, silver buckles to his shoes, and white silk stockings, his face was marked by intemperance; his short neck lay in folds over his lace cravat; his cheeks were red and swollen; his nose was painted—these are all indications of strong drink. Moreover, his voice was thick and his shoulders unsteady, as if, which was indeed the case, he had recently come from a tavern. It is not uncommon for a respectable citizen to show signs of drink in the evening, perhaps in the afternoon; but it is not, happily, usual for a man of business to betray this indulgence in the morning.

‘Madam,’ he said, ‘I come to ask if you have received my letter.’

‘Sir, I have received it; I have read it. Here it is on my table.’

‘And what, madam, may I ask, is your answer?’

‘My answer . . . my answer, Mr. Fulton? I have not yet thought of an answer. The letter only arrived this morning. Perhaps in a month or two——’

‘No, madam. By your leave, not a month or two—not a day or two.’

‘Permit me to remind you, Mr. Fulton, that, when I ordered these things, one of the reasons which persuaded me to take them was your assurance that I should be allowed six months’ credit.’

‘I do not remember any such assurance,’ he replied boldly.

‘Come, Mr. Fulton! I think if you rack your brains a little you will remember that promise of six months’ credit, of which only six weeks have expired. My answer, sir, is

that I must take that credit. I want that credit, and I must have it!’

‘Madam, as regards that promise’—his voice grew thicker—‘I cannot remember it. How, then, can I allow it?’

‘Sir’—the lady’s temper began to rise—‘I perceive that you do not intend to remember your promise. I have therefore nothing more to say. I have no answer to give. You will do what you please. But I demand that credit.’

The man’s manner changed. He became suddenly cringing, and he tried to be persuasive. He leaned over the table and essayed a smile, which became a fixed grin.

‘Madam,’ he said, ‘I am most unwilling to press you, but my own affairs——’

‘Your own affairs, sir?’

‘My own affairs, madam.’ He hesitated, and spoke at random. ‘They are in confusion. I know not what may happen. In fine, I am urgently in want of the money.’

‘Can a substantial citizen of Ludgate Hill be in urgent want of £95?’

‘You mistake, madam.’ He rose up with dignity. ‘Every man in business is sometimes pressed. It is not the amount—it is the occasion.’

‘I must take that credit you promised. I am sorry for your position.’

‘As for my position, it was never more assured. I am a citizen—a freeman of the Drapers’ Company; my affairs are on a large scale. I am considered as the equal of any merchant,’ he assured her with swelling words and looks.

‘I must take that credit,’ she persisted.

‘Madam’—his face became purple—‘I must have that

money.' He banged the table with his fist. 'I say that I must have that money——'

Now, here the lady made a great and grievous mistake. For she ought to have referred the question to an attorney; there was nothing unusual in a credit of six months, and, which was more important, the debt would have been found on examination to be due to the man's creditors, and not to himself. For, instead of being a prosperous tradesman, as he asserted, he was nothing better than a man of straw, who intended to get this money for himself and to defraud his creditors. The man, in a word, might threaten, but he could do nothing. This, however, the lady did not know.

'Go,' she said; 'you will do what you please.'

The man hesitated. The lady pointed to the door. Her face was hard and her manner unbending.

'You will take the consequences?' he said.

'Go.' Again she pointed to the door.

'You will take the consequences of robbing—yes, of robbing—a substantial City merchant, madam—a substantial——'

The lady rose. He said no more, but vanished. She sank back into her chair.

'Oh!' she groaned again, 'what a *fool*, what a *fool* I have been!'

She took up a second letter. It was from her dress-maker, a certain Mrs. Brymer, and was much shorter, yet to the same effect:

'MADAM,

'I am most sorry to trouble you, or any of my customers. I can wait, as a rule, for a long time. But your bill is now, I find, upwards of £70; this is too

large a bill to run on any longer. The necessities of my business compel me to ask for payment as soon as it is convenient to yourself. It is with the greatest reluctance that I press you for payment. Suffer me to call upon you to-morrow about noon. We may perhaps find means to adjust this difficulty quickly and without trouble. I assure you that I have assisted many ladies to get through difficulties, and at the same time to pay me their liabilities.

‘I remain, madam, with much respect,

‘Your obedient servant,

‘PATTY BRYMER.’

‘The letter is not threatening like the other,’ Isabel murmured, ‘but I know the woman. She is very resolute. I am more afraid of her than of the man Fulton. What will she say when I confide the whole to her?’

She started and turned pale. For there was a step on the stair; the sound of a step may be a sound of terror to a debtor. This was the step of her dressmaker—of the creditor who was going to call at twelve. What should she come for but to beg, to accuse, and to threaten?

A tap at the door, and her visitor turned the handle and came in.

It was, in fact, none other than the dressmaker, Mrs. Brymer, author of the short epistle you have heard. Isabel half rose; she gasped out certain words that meant nothing; she sank back in her chair, sick and faint with terror. She had never before been dunned, and she knew not what her creditors could do.

The woman was plainly dressed; she was a little woman and now old; her face was lined and seamed with a thousand crows’-feet—it was the face of a woman much

occupied with affairs, shrewd and hard. It was also stamped with the wisdom that comes to some women of experience and affairs. She looked very wise and as inscrutable as an oracle. She stood in the door for a minute looking with curiosity at her customer, as if she would learn the whole truth from her face. Then she advanced a step, closed the door softly, and rapped the table, not threateningly, but softly, with her knuckles.

‘Well, madam?’ she said.

Mrs. Weyland inclined her head. She could not speak.

‘I am very sorry, madam, to be importunate——’

‘If you can give me time——’

Mrs. Brymer—everybody knows her shop in Monmouth Street; there is no more celebrated dressmaker in the whole of London—smiled quietly. There was no appearance of threatening about the woman; she was not uncivil or disrespectful; but her face expressed her resolution: she was come to get her money.

‘You ask for time, madam. Truly I would give you with pleasure as much time as you please—all the time there is—if you can show me how much the better you would be if you had it, or how much better I should be. Take time, madam, if you please, but it is not unreasonable to ask what security you have to offer in case I give you time.’

‘No, it is not unreasonable. And yet—and yet—oh, Mrs. Brymer, what answer am I to make?’

She began to cry again; the tears were real, they were not affected; but if they were designed to soften the dressmaker’s heart they were quite useless. A woman has very little sympathy with another woman’s tears.

Mrs. Brymer took a chair and planted it opposite to her customer. Then she sat down firmly and with resolution.

‘Now,’ she said, ‘I have come for an explanation and a confession.’

‘A confession?’

Mrs. Weyland made a show of sitting upright with indignation.

‘Madam, I know a few things, but not all. I know that you are ruined; you have lost, I believe, the whole of the fortune that your husband left you—it was £4,000—at the card-table; you are in debt to others besides myself: if you cannot pay what you owe . . . but, indeed, I am sure that you know the terrible alternative——’

‘Mrs. Brymer,’ Isabel replied with some dignity, ‘if you know all this, there is no necessity for you to rehearse it. Nor is there any necessity for me to confess my affairs to you.’

‘They are my own affairs. Your ladyship owes me the sum of £70 with some shillings and pence. I can no more afford to lose this money than you can afford to pay it.’

‘Then I do not understand——’

‘Madam, I will be plain with you. Let me know exactly the state of your affairs, and I may be able to help you, but on conditions. Believe me, I know the affairs of many ladies. You will never repent your confidence.’

‘The only help I want is money or time. And that you cannot give me.’

‘There are other ways besides finding money or time. Let me remind your ladyship that if you do not get help and cannot pay your debts the end is certain. You can, therefore, do no harm to your affairs by letting me know the truth, and you may find it to your advantage. My reason for offering to help you is nothing in the world but to get payment of my claim.’

‘How can you help me to pay your claim?’

‘That you shall learn presently. Meantime, let me know your position.’

There was some comfort in merely talking over her position, even though it was with a threatening creditor.

Isabel sighed. ‘Well, then, ask me any questions you please, and I will answer truthfully.’

‘Your husband died some three years ago. He left you a small fortune.’

‘Between £4,000 and £5,000.’

‘Is any of this money left? I believe that there is none.’

‘Very little. To be frank with you, not more than about £180.’

‘What has become of it? I was right in saying that it has been lost at the hazard-table?’

‘Some of it. I know not how much. I kept no record. Some at cards; some on dress; some this way and that way—how should I know where it has gone?’

‘And you have debts. What is the amount of your debts?’

‘I owe Mr. Fulton, draper, of Ludgate Hill, a bill of £95. He said that I might wait for six months, but now he presses. I owe you the sum of £70. Those are the only large debts. There are also a few trifles——’

‘Oh! Mr. Fulton presses you, does he?’

‘He presses me and threatens me.’

‘Have you anything besides that small sum of money?’

‘My dresses and a little jewellery, worth—I know not——’

‘Humph! Your husband, however, had an elder brother—Lord Stratherrick.’

‘But he is quite ruined; he has gambled away everything—his life interest in his estates, his pictures, his

library, everything is gone. He now lives in a corner of his empty house. He can do nothing for me, even if he was desirous of helping me. But he is a selfish man, like all gamblers.'

'You have friends of your own, however. You are not destitute of friends.'

'Mrs. Brymer, I will be quite frank with you. My father, now old, is wealthy. But he is a Nonconformist, and he is austere. He has never forgiven me for my marriage. He considered my husband a profligate, because he was a man of quality—my husband, the most sober and sensible of men! My father would not consent to the marriage, so I ran away and was married at Mayfair.'

'When your father knows your position, he will perhaps relent.'

'You do not know him. He might relent if my misfortunes were due to other causes. But I have wasted £4,000 and more. He is a merchant who looks upon prodigality with horror. I have a brother as well; he is more austere than my father and more unforgiving; he looks to the succession. If he finds out about the debts and the card-table, there will no longer be any hope for me. He will so represent the affair to my father that forgiveness will be impossible. If I can conceal the truth, perhaps my father may once more regard me as a daughter.'

'It is unfortunate. Would they consent to see you consigned to a debtors' prison?'

'It would be the cause of a final cutting-off. My brother would find something in the Bible that would sanction hardness of heart. Believe me, Mrs. Brymer, I have no hope at all of any relief from my own people if they learn the truth about my affairs.'

‘You owe one creditor £95, and another £70; you have in hand about £180 or thereabouts, with a little jewellery. And you have no prospect of assistance from anyone. Truly, madam, the position is most serious.’

‘It is indeed serious.’

‘Then, madam’—the dressmaker drew her chair a little nearer and dropped her voice almost to a whisper—‘we must consider my method.’

‘Do you really mean that you can find a way?’

‘There is but one way, and that way will terrify you at first. Do not start and protest that you cannot and you will not consent. It is a way that has been adopted by many ladies of fashion, though, for good reasons, they do not boast of it. At first it may seem impossible, but I can show you that it is not only possible, but easy of execution.’

‘What way is there? In the name of Heaven, do not mock me! I am already half distraught with trouble. What way?’

‘Madam, it is not known to you, perhaps, that you can transfer the whole of your debts, by marrying, to your husband.’

‘But who would marry a creature like myself, who must confess to having lost in three years more than £4,000, besides incurring debts?’

‘I can find you a husband, madam.’

‘A man who will consent to marry me? Impossible! And to take over my debts? Impossible, again!’

‘Quite possible, on the other hand.’

‘Is it a man whom I could marry? I mean there are some men to marry whom would be worse than death.’

‘It will be a man you can marry. Not a man of fashion,

perhaps; not one whom you would accept as your lover. But you would leave him at the church door.'

'Who, then, would it be?'

'You might marry a sailor, unsuspecting, who would be arrested—I would take care of that—on coming out of the church doors. He would be taken to the Debtors' Prison; there he would stay for the rest of his life, and you would hear no more of him.'

'Would you have me lock up an innocent young fellow for life? Fie, fie! I could not, even to save myself.'

'Many ladies are not so squeamish. However, we might find for you some man already languishing in the King's Bench, and without hopes of release; such an one, for a trifle, would willingly take over the additional burden of your debts. A few hundreds more would make no difference.'

'Could he not make me share his imprisonment with him?'

'Certainly not. You would be free to live as you please, save that in his lifetime you could not marry again. In the Fleet or the Bench they mostly die young. The bad air and the drink kill them.'

Isabel listened with a serious air. The method seemed to offer possibilities of escape.

'Truly,' she said, 'if the additional burden made no difference, I see no reason. . . . Yet there is a reason, too: Mr. Fulton has been here; he has also written; he is in great trouble—he says he must become a bankrupt. I thought that if I paid him all that I have——'

The dressmaker shrieked:

'Pay him all? Pray, madam, what will then become of me? I know something of this man Fulton. He drinks; he spends his time in taverns, instead of attend-

ing to his business. As for your making him a bankrupt, he must indeed be in a poor way of business for a City tradesman, and on Ludgate Hill, if a bill of £95 makes him bankrupt.'

'Well, then, if I am not to pay him——'

'You will pay me instead. I am here, madam, to talk over your misfortunes, not the misfortune of this draper. There are others, I suppose, who owe him money. Let him apply to them. Believe me, madam, you must harden your heart.'

Isabel sighed.

'I am sorry for anyone on whom I have brought trouble. Well, then, can you find me such a man, already in prison, to whom another hundred pounds or so of debt will make no difference?'

'I can find such a man.'

'Then—oh, Mrs. Brymer, it seems a dreadful thing to do!'

'There is a third way, the surest of any. But it might be bruited abroad, and it is always ill thought of; nothing but necessity, in fact, can justify a gentlewoman in taking such a step.'

'What is it?'

'You will not like the thought of it at all. But it is the simplest, and generally the easiest, plan.'

'What is it?' Isabel repeated.

'There are always lying in Newgate men condemned to death——'

The widow shuddered.

'Oh! Not that!'

'You guess what I would say, then? That makes it easier. I could find someone unmarried, friendless, who would not know who you were, to whom the promise of

drink in plenty until his time came would make him quite happy. I would say, "Marry him." In two or three weeks he would be dead.' Again the widow shuddered. 'And no one would know, and you would be quite free—with all your debts taken off your back—free to marry again or to live as you please.'

'But—oh, the horrid thing!—to marry a man going to be hanged! To be the widow of a man actually hanged at Tyburn!'

'Why not, since no one would know anything about it?'

'To marry a condemned felon—a murderer, a burglar, a highwayman—oh, I could not!'

'You would marry him only in name. You would leave him in his cell after the ceremony. A bottle of rum would console him for the loss of his bride. Indeed, for that matter, he would expect nothing more than the bottle of rum.'

Still the lady shook her head.

'Madam,' the temptress repeated, 'you must harden your heart. I have told you what to do. There is a plain choice before you. I can find you a sailor; once get that fellow locked up, with debts of hundreds keeping him there, and you are safe. I can find you a prisoner already hopelessly confined. He would be as good as the sailor. Or there is the condemned felon. He is safest. The only condition I make is that you settle, immediately, my bill in full. Does your ladyship agree? If not, there is—but I spare you the truth. You know better than myself what will happen.'

Mrs. Weyland looked out into the street. Alas! to leave the free air of the town; the dear delights even of the streets, not to speak of the play, the gardens, the

park, the assembly, the card-party, how could she live away from them? How could she live in the close air, the dirt, the noise, the conversation, of a debtors' prison? She looked at the letters on the table, and her lips parted in assent: she thought of the poor wretch jingling his chains in the condemned cell whom she was to marry, and her cheek paled. She thought of her austere father and her brother, and of their wrath, and the relentless justice with which they had already cut her off; and she was ready to assent.

Mrs. Brymer watched her narrowly. The money due to her was of the greatest importance; she had payments to make and bills to meet; the loss of this money would mean her great embarrassment. But she said no more. She folded her hands in her lap and waited.

Mrs. Weyland held out her hand.

'I accept,' she murmured.

The other sighed with relief. She had saved her debt.

'You have done well,' she said. 'Indeed, there was nothing else to be done.'

'No one is to know,' Isabel stipulated with a white face and eyes full of terror.

'Certainly not. No one will know. You may make yourself quite easy.' Mrs. Brymer rose. 'Madam, time presses; we know not when Mr. Fulton will issue his writ. Perhaps it is already issued.'

'Are you going to act at once? It is very sudden.'

'We must act at once. I have already, madam, in your interest been up and doing; I have found a young sailor and have promised him a bride. But, after all, he might be violent; he might break prison and escape. Once on board again, he would laugh at the law. I will pass over the sailor.'

‘The poor young man will be looking for his promised wife,’ said the sympathetic widow.

‘He will console himself, never fear. Well, I have also found a man in the King’s Bench. He has no hope of release, and will consent to anything that will give him a small allowance to live upon. I have also been to Newgate. There is a fellow under sentence who laughed when I proposed such a marriage. For as much rum as he can drink he will do anything. Come, madam, we will go first to the King’s Bench.’

She rose. ‘I repeat that my conditions in return for this service are simply that you pay me my claim in full. That is all. Do you promise?’

‘Yes—yes—I promise: oh! anything—anything to relieve me of this anxiety.’

CHAPTER II

ON THE POOR SIDE

THERE is nothing uncommon in the visit of a lady to a debtors' prison. Always there are languishing within those walls unfortunate gentlemen, some imprisoned until their friends succeed in making arrangements with their creditors ; others lying here for life, either subsisting on such small allowances as unwilling brothers or grudging cousins consent to give, or starving in misery—such misery as we would not inflict on the worst of criminals—on the Poor side. It is not therefore surprising that a compassionate lady should from time to time be seen in those dingy courts, bringing assistance and consolation to one who had formerly been her friend, her cousin, her play-fellow, perhaps her lover.

This morning, about one o'clock, the hungry, those on the Poor side, were dreaming of dinners impossible of attainment, the regular time for dinner being replaced by casual feeding at such hours and times as might please Fortune the inconstant or Luck the uncertain (a more favourite goddess on the Poor side); and on the Master's side the collegians who had money in purse and pocket were considering seriously what their resources would allow—whether the two-shilling ordinary with a pint of wine after it, or the humble fried sausage and baked potato, with a

tankard of black beer. At this time the courts of the prison are nearly deserted, for those who belong to the Master's side wish it to be understood that they are at the ordinary, and therefore, if they cannot afford that costly banquet, lie snug in their chambers or repair to the cellar where the more modest delicacies can be procured. So that the arrival of two ladies in the court where the prisoners take their exercise was hardly noticed at all. One of them, wrapped in a silk-lined cloak or mantle, wore a mask, and was evidently unwilling to be recognised. By her step and carriage she appeared to be young ; she wore, however, the cap of a widow in the second or third year of her mourning. The other, an older woman, plainly dressed, was evidently of inferior station. She walked upright without mask or any attempt at concealment ; her face was hard and resolute ; she seemed intent on some business. Those who saw her felt certain tremors or sinkings, the memory of past experiences, because she looked like one of that hard-hearted tribe, the unforgiving creditor. Her kind had, at least, done their worst to the prisoners in keeping them locked up ; but the memory remained. Therefore, at sight of her hard and resolute face, knees trembled, hands shook, and those within reach of their own staircase hastily retired to places of concealment.

This visitor looked up and down the court, which was, as I have said, nearly empty ; a few of the prisoners were walking about ; a few were playing rackets against the wall ; some were sitting in the sun after their frugal meal ; some were talking over a journal of the day or the day before yesterday. All were shabby, all were dull, all were listless, careless, down-at-heel and hopeless. It is the fashion to represent the College as full of conviviality and

good-fellowship; it is full of drink, but it is dull—hopelessly dull and stupid.

The lady did not see the prisoner whom she was seeking. She turned to a turnkey standing aside, dangling and rattling his bunch of keys.

‘I want Mr. Oliver Macnamara,’ she said. ‘He is one of your prisoners on the other side. Can you send for him? He is perhaps at his dinner.’

‘His dinner! Ho! ho! A fat and plentiful dinner they get on the other side. Well, madam, I will send for him. Macnamara—Macnamara? Is it a lawyer? Is he an Irishman?’

‘An Irishman, certainly, and he wears a lawyer’s gown.’

‘Ay, ay! His detainers are beggarly. He went over to the Poor side a week ago. I bundled him over myself, seeing that he was unable to pay for his bed. This is a place where we score up no chalks.’

‘I can understand your precautions,’ said Mrs. Brymer, for it was that dressmaker. ‘Being in business myself, I have suffered by running up scores. Well, sir, he is on the Poor side: that I knew. Madam’—she whispered to her companion—‘this is the prisoner of whom I spoke to you. He is on the Poor side; his pride must be broken by this time. Hunger and cold speedily break them up; he will be willing to make a bargain with us on terms more favourable than if he had money left. We must not offer him too much.’

‘Is he a gentleman, then? You said he was a lawyer. Is he very old and broken? We must not be hard upon a poor old man.’

‘He is not old at all. He is quite young. I suppose he is a gentleman, being a lawyer.’

‘Young and a gentleman! Oh, Mrs. Brymer, we must not be hard on youth and poverty.’

‘You must think of yourself, madam, not of him. In business there is no pity, no friendship, and no affection. It is everyone for himself.’

‘You want young Macnamara?’ said the turnkey.
‘Humph! suppose he won’t come?’

‘Why not? Tell him that a lady wants to see him.’

‘It’s his pride. Some of them are so at first. After a bit they drop their pride. You see, ladies, he is a gentleman, a very pretty gentleman, who cannot get his friends to pay his twopenny debts. And, besides, he has had to sell his clothes, and is now in rags. Some of those on the Poor side like to show their rags—they move compassion! Gar! compassion—and for them as are destitute and friendless! As if they do not deserve all they get! What do they expect? They’ve got the boards to sleep on, and their share of the doles. They’re better off inside than out. Some of them are ashamed of their rags. This young fellow, this gentleman—who is in for a mere trifle—is ashamed of his. Let him alone, and the shame of the rags, as well as the cold and the starvation, will kill him off in a single winter. I know the sort. He will be dead in six months.’

Mrs. Brymer nudged her companion.

‘We are in luck,’ she repeated. ‘Dead in six months! Could anything be better? We shall get him very cheap.’ Then she turned to the man of the keys. ‘Mr. Macnamara will come. Tell him it is the lady with whom he held discourse last week. Take us to some place where we can be private.’ She placed a shilling in the man’s hand.

He looked at it and nodded.

‘Ay,’ he said. ‘Now you talk sense. Well, you can have the use of my snuggery for half an hour. I shall charge you no more than five shillings. If you want drink, call for it. There’s as good drink in the College as there is out of it. The wine, ladies, I can recommend.’

The snuggery was a small room, abominably close and smelling of beer, punch, and tobacco—the room in which some of the residents, those who could afford to spend a shilling or so, met in the evening to drink and talk and smoke tobacco, and to pretend that the prison was the home of wit, merriment, and happiness. In the morning the place was deserted.

The man returned in a few minutes bringing with him his prisoner, Mr. Oliver Macnamara, whose pride, it appeared, had been broken up by the arrival of misery and destitution. Who can be proud when hunger gnaws at the vitals?

He was quite a young man, his beard neglected and stubbly, his hair growing out under his wig. He wore a waistcoat tightly buttoned, with no sign of a shirt; he had no coat, but, instead, a lawyer’s gown stained with daily use and ragged at the skirts, for he had been a prisoner for six months; his wig was that belonging to a member of the Junior Bar, but ruined by long neglect and the want of combing; he had still his lawyer’s bands, but they were no longer white; his feet were bare—he wore neither shoes nor stockings; his face was pinched and pale; his eyes were unnaturally bright; he showed, indeed, in his appearance, not only extreme poverty, but insufficient food and nourishment. In a word, he looked more forlorn, more hopeless, more mocked by Fortune, more buffeted by Fate, than one would have believed possible in one so young. For, as one could see plainly, he was no

common person ; upon his face lay, visible to all, the stamp of a scholar ; his clear-cut mouth, his regular features, his square forehead, showed not only a scholar, but also a man of fine understanding, of resolution and a clear mind.

He came into the room looking from one of the ladies to the other with a horrible, guilty shame expressed clearly in his face. One of them felt a sinking of the heart and a sudden compassion at the sight of a wreck so premature, and, apparently, so complete. The other smiled grimly.

‘Why,’ she whispered, ‘we are in luck, truly. The young man is deeper down than I thought possible a week ago. He looks as if he had gaol-fever ; I am sure that if we dared to touch him he would be found burning hot with fever. We are in great luck. In six months—nay, in a few weeks—he will be dead and you will be free. Oh, we shall make very easy terms with him.’

Mr. Macnamara stood before the ladies without a word. But his lip trembled, the only sign that his pride, which was greater than his shame, allowed him to make.

‘Sir,’ said the dressmaker, ‘you doubtless remember the conversation we had a week ago.’

‘I remember it, madam, perfectly. It was not a conversation of the kind which a man in my position readily forgets.’

‘Stop—stop!’ interposed the lady in the mask. ‘He is in want of food. I am certain that he is in want of food. Let us first order some refreshment for him. We must not enter upon business with him until he has appeased his hunger.’

‘As you please, madam,’ Mrs. Brymer answered coldly. ‘I should, however, recommend business first. When our business is complete he can order what he likes.’

There was, in fact, nothing at that moment which the prisoner desired more than food. He yearned and longed for food ; he was faint and sick for want of food. At the mere mention of food he changed colour. Pride could not prevent this betrayal. He reeled ; he was fain to clutch at the back of a chair.

A debtors' prison, however, is like Leadenhall Market in containing a supply of everything that man can desire (except a quickening breath of fresh air), provided there is money to pay for it. Cold beef was immediately attainable, with bread and a pint of Lisbon.

'Can you eat cold beef, sir?' asked the lady with the mask.

The young man sat down and proceeded to show that beef, cold, cut off the silver side, with bread, was at the moment the one dish which he would have chosen before all others. Indeed, for a hungry man, cold beef, slightly underdone, has no equal. All this in spite of nods, winks and admonitory sniffs from Mrs. Brymer, who saw in this perverse and ill-timed charity the loss of those advantages conferred upon the bargainers by the present necessities. The food restored some colour to the young man's cheek and some strength to his limbs. The wine also gave some courage to his heart. He finished his repast and stood up again with a low bow of gratitude.

'Now, Mr. Macnamara'—the dressmaker resumed business—'we have wasted time already. You remember, you say, our discourse. You were then, I believe, still in possession of a little money, and, if I remember aright, of shoes and stockings. Your case was desperate, but you concealed from me how desperate it was.'

'I told you I was a prisoner for life. What more was there to conceal?'

‘You did not tell me, sir,’ she added severely, ‘that you were on the point of becoming quite destitute—a mere pauper and beggar. Your transference to the Poor side will certainly make a difference in our arrangements. We cannot offer a guinea a week to one on the Poor side. Would you bestow Burgundy or Rhenish on a common tramp of the road?’

‘Mrs. Brymer,’ murmured the lady in the mask, ‘spare him. He is a gentleman.’

‘As you will, madam. My poverty is such that I must consent to anything.’

‘You undertake to assume certain liabilities. Let us have no mistake about the business. These liabilities are not large, but they are at present quite beyond your means of payment. They would therefore, by themselves, make your release impossible unless the creditors consent. And this they will not do. But that is no hardship, because you are already in the hands of your own creditors, who are equally hard-hearted. You are beyond any hope of release. You are now on the Poor side. You have no rent to pay; you have no fees to pay; everything is cheap on the Poor side; and you have your shares of the doles, while you take your turn in rattling the box. A pretty fall it is, for a gentleman.’ The young man changed colour but said nothing. ‘I would propose, therefore, as you are doubtless quite unprovided with any comforts, first to find you a mattress and a blanket, and next to give you an allowance of five shillings a week. That, I conclude, will make you quite comfortable—even, for the Poor side, rich.’

The young man bowed.

The lady who had charge of the business went on relentlessly:

‘You will marry the lady at once. I can bring a Fleet parson here in half an hour—you will make no attempt, at this nor at any future time, to claim her as your wife. She will be as much dead to you after the ceremony as at present. Do you quite understand this?’

‘Quite. There is no necessity to repeat this agreement.’

‘I am the best judge of the necessity. Very well, then. Some persons in your condition have tried threats of various kinds. If you try anything of that nature we shall increase the detainers.’

‘I understand. Is this not enough?’

‘And we shall stop the allowance. Well, I think there is no more to be said. If you behave well and can be trusted, there might at some time—we make no promise—but there might, I say, at some time be a question of the Rules.’

‘The Rules would be no use to me. I could no more make a livelihood in the Rules than in this place. You have said quite enough, madam, and more than enough. But my position obliges me to hear all and to endure all.

‘Madam’—he turned to the lady with the mask, who had not spoken—‘you are, I suppose, the lady concerned? Understand, I pray you, that the degradation offered me must be accepted for the sake of the food that it offers. Degradation, shame, humiliation, cannot touch a wretch on the Poor side. Hunger is the whole armour of such a one against any kind of shame.’

‘Sir, you speak, and you feel, as a gentleman. Believe me, I am deeply grieved to see a young gentleman in this condition.’

‘Business’—the dressmaker repeated her former lesson—‘knows no compassion. There is no friendship or pity in

business. Let us settle the business first; after that we can have as much compassion as you please.'

'Do not, I entreat you,' the lady continued, 'sacrifice your chances of freedom for a mere pittance. Consider, sir, you might easily be released so far as your liabilities are concerned.'

He laughed bitterly. 'My chances! If I owed the whole of the National Debt, the worth of the Golconda mines, I could not be more hopelessly a prisoner than I am now. My chief detaining creditor is more hard-hearted and relentless than one would believe possible in a mere Mohock.'

'Sir,' said Mrs. Brymer, 'he is a man in business. How can a tradesman live if his customers do not pay their debts? You are an example. The knowledge that you are suffering this imprisonment for so small a sum—beggarily the turnkey called it—is a warning to all others who will not pay.'

'Perhaps—perhaps.'

'I have heard,' she went on, 'of persons being arrested and kept for life by detainers of a few shillings. Is that hard-heartedness? Not so, sir. It is rather an example—an admonition—to the rest of the world. Believe me, sir, though it seems so hard to you, there are thousands who would never pay their debts, small or large, were it not for the example of such as you—such as you.'

The dressmaker spoke with some warmth, because to her, as a woman in trade, the debtors' prison is like a Magna Charta for the protection of herself and such as herself.

'Sir,' said the lady in the mask, 'if your private friends——'

'Madam, among all the people of this country and my

own, there is not a soul who knows me, or is sorry for me, or would lift up his finger to save me. Not one. They do not even know of my misfortunes. Why should I let them know? They would not help me; they would only whisper each other, for the credit of the family, to keep it dark.'

'No friends—and no hope,' the lady murmured. 'Oh! Poor man! poor man!'

'Business first—compassion afterwards,' said Mrs. Brymer. 'Shall I send for the parson?'

'Wait a moment, Mrs. Brymer. I would first have a little further discourse with this gentleman.'

'As you please, madam. Time, however, presses. The parson is generally in his cups by two or three. But—as you please. Even if the writ were served, you could be married after it just as well. But it would be better to despatch the business.'

'In a few minutes. Mrs. Brymer, will you oblige me by taking a view of the court outside, while I converse with this unfortunate gentleman—with Mr. Macnamara?'

'Madam, I entreat you. Business before pleasure. An agreement before compassion. A soft heart has ruined many honest tradesmen. Oh! it will lead to a throwing away of money. Five shillings—five shillings a week—on the Poor side; with the doles and no rent—oh! it should be more than enough. Consider, madam, you are not a Lady Bountiful.'

'I will consider. For the moment, Mrs. Brymer, please leave me.'

Mrs. Brymer obeyed, shaking her head.

'Now that we are alone, sir, pray take a chair. Will you have another pint of wine? No? Forgive me if I have seemed inhospitable. Tell me, sir, if you will—

believe me, it is not idle curiosity—tell me who you are and how you came to fall so low. Your appearance, your manner, your speech, all proclaim a gentleman and a scholar.’

‘I am a lawyer, madam, as these rags may show you. I was of the Irish Bar; I have been called to the English Bar, by the Benchers of the Inner Temple.’

‘A lawyer! There are not, surely, many lawyers here.’

‘Madam, I believe that I am the only one. The lawyers avoid the penalties of debt; they are mostly connected with wealthy families or with attorneys in the way of business. They are not, as a rule, very poor at the outset; their creditors know whom they can trust. As for me, I came over to make my fortune.’

‘You said that you had no friends in Ireland.’

‘I have cousins in plenty. We are a poor family of gentlefolk. My father was in Holy Orders. He died, and I spent my slender patrimony at Trinity College, and in studying for the Bar in Dublin. Then I came over, trusting to the possession of certain gifts or qualities which, I thought, would advance me. I had but little when I arrived in London; but I had no fear. I thought I should get on quickly, and I bought certain things with which to make a better appearance, anticipating Fortune.’

He stopped and sighed.

‘It was a mistake that you made.’

‘Fortune delayed. She would not be hurried. The beginning to which I had looked forward was slow in arriving. Then my creditor—there was but one—began to press for the money. I had only promises to give him. I could not, in a word, pay his bill—it was only twenty-five guineas. Madam, I am willing to acknowledge the truth of what that lady, your friend, advanced. It is true

that there are many people who would not pay their just debts but for the horror of the prison. My example, and the example of such as myself, are to them a warning. It is the only justification of the debtors' prison. If at any time our legislators could see their way to enforce the payment of debts without imprisonment for life, this unjust punishment would cease. As it is, madam, I am imprisoned for life, for a debt of twenty-five guineas, which I am forbidden to pay by the fact of my imprisonment. The thing is monstrous, but it is the law.'

'Twenty-five guineas? Do you mean that a gentleman like yourself can be imprisoned for life—for the whole of his life—for a paltry debt of twenty-five guineas?'

'The law makes no distinction between gentlemen and the common sort. It imprisons everybody for life; it has but one sentence. Whether the debt is a shilling or ten thousand pounds, one must pay or be imprisoned for life.'

'But—surely—twenty-five guineas!'

'It is not much. The law, again, in order to keep the prisoner from the shame of confessing the small amount for which he is locked up, encourages the attorneys to practise the rule of multiplication. My debt is now about seventy-five pounds, I believe. This, you observe, in the eyes of turnkeys and prisoners themselves, is much more creditable.'

'But—pardon me—I am inquisitive—have you really no friends who would pay so much for you? It is not much. You could afterwards repay it.'

'Madam, I have no friends. Cousins I have, but cousins are not fond of relieving the necessities of their relations. Besides, there are religious difficulties. Some of them are Catholics, and my father was a Protestant.'

Some of them are poor, and would resent the mere suggestion of giving help. Friends? Yes. I had friends at Trinity, but they are mostly penniless like myself. When all have to make their way in the world, what compassion or assistance can one who fails expect? He is like a man wounded on the field of battle and left to die.'

'Is your father living?'

The young man shook his head.

'He died. He built so many hopes upon me that I thank God he has not lived to see my destitution.'

'You are, then, quite friendless?'

'Quite—so far as asking assistance. If I were successful I should find scores of friends—of my old set at Trinity—who would rally round me. I can ask no one for assistance. If I could borrow I have no security; and, besides, the costs, in such a case as mine, go on growing of their own accord. The attorney sits at his desk and watches them as they grow. The costs in such a case as this are like the brambles which grow and spread until they cover the whole ground. Still, it is, as you say, a poor thing to represent a life-long—or a life-short—spell of captivity. At the Last Day I shall make answer and say: "I have done no work. My talent was taken from me and buried in a napkin. I have been forbidden to work. My sins are those of discontent and rebellion against the strokes of Fate." And all, as you say, for twenty-five guineas—with the attorney's costs. He will not get those costs paid. That is some consolation.'

'A poor consolation.'

The lady's eyes were visible behind her mask; they were soft and limpid eyes, and they were filled with tears.

'It was really shameful on the Master's side to confess

that one was kept here for a debt so trifling—twenty-five guineas! Why, they pride themselves on the extent of their debts. A man detained for thousands is a leader there, by right of his extensive liabilities. Outside, wealth commands respect; there it is the amount of a man's debts. On the Poor side there is no such pride; we are all detained for small amounts—beggarily, as the turnkey said.'

'Debt, with costs, no more than seventy-five pounds! Mr. Macnamara, I fear that I should be doing you a grievous injustice if I were to saddle you with my debts.'

'Not at all, madam. In the first place, I should rejoice to be of service to a lady so soft-hearted and so full of mercy as yourself. In the next place, your offer assures me a sufficiency of food. Do not think too meanly of me when I repeat that for food I would put away from me the last rags of pride and self-respect.'

'Sir, I cannot think meanly of you. I think of you with so much pity. Sir, it is impossible; I will not load you with my debts. I retract my offer. I will not accept of you as a husband even in name and title only. It is too great a burden of humiliation to lay upon your shoulders.'

The young man was silent. He glanced at his bare feet and the ragged gown.

'As you will, madam. I have at least conversed once more with a gentlewoman. I thank you. And I will go back to the Poor side.' He rose and bowed low. 'I thank you, madam, for your compassion.'

'Stay, sir, one moment. Is your condition quite hopeless?'

'It is quite hopeless.'

'Even if I refuse to do you the injustice—the cruelty—

of making your imprisonment life-long without counting your private detainers ?

‘Madam, there is no hope for me.’

‘And you will go back to your misery ? How will you live ?’

‘I do not know, madam.’

‘You will have insufficient food. The winter will come on ; you will have no fire, no bed, no covering. Alas, sir, alas ! What will you do ?’

He smiled—a cold and wintry smile.

‘Madam,’ he said, ‘there is a splendid bed large enough to accommodate us all, not far down the road. It is a parish bed. Those who lie in it feel neither heat nor cold. They go barefoot, they want no clothes, they want no food. They are nameless, and no one inquires for them. The feet of the people pass daily beside their bed, but they hear nothing ; no one asks after them ; they lie asleep and they are forgotten. They want no pity, madam, not even of your kind heart ; and they ask not to be remembered. Forget me, madam ; let me go on. That bed waits to receive me and all my ragged friends on the Poor side.’

Again he bowed and would have gone out, but the lady stopped him again.

‘Sir, stay. If you were free to-morrow, what would you do ?’

‘What would I do ? If I were free !’ His eyes suddenly lit up. ‘If I were free ? I have never dared to ask the question. If I were free ? Why speak of impossibilities ?’

‘Sir !’ The lady placed her hand upon his arm. ‘It is not impossible—believe me, it is not impossible. Say, again, if you were free ?’

‘If I were free—oh, if I were free !’ A sudden flash of

colour flew into his cheeks. 'If I were free! I should go back to the Inner Temple. Where else could I go?'

'And then?'

'I should wait on Fortune. There are many chances for a barrister. Why, I am a scholar, as good as most of them. I know as much law as any of those who are beginning. I can speak—I learned to speak at Trinity; all Irishmen, they say, can speak. I should make, somehow, a start, and—and—and—oh, God! I am a prisoner, on the Poor side. My brain is on fire! It is your wine and your compassion. And I dream of King's Counsel and of Judges!'

The tears crowded to his eyes and rolled down his cheek.

'Sir,' she repeated, 'I will not, I say, do you the injustice we contemplated. Meantime let me'—she placed a purse, her long silk purse, with gold at both ends, in his hand—'let me—against the time when you are King's Counsel, and have taken silk, and are a Serjeant-at-Law—advance you a small sum.'

He stood silent. The purse lay in his hand; he was transfixed. His eyes filled with tears as he put the purse from him.

'Madam,' he gasped at length, speaking in a manner at random, as one who knows not what to say, 'it is too much. You are an angel! The prison has become a Pool of Bethesda. Its waters, to be sure, are always troubled. The angel takes the prisoners out of the troubled waters. It is not quite the same.' He collected himself. 'Madam,' he said, 'how shall I—madam, you overwhelm me——'

'Then, show your sense by taking the money. Indeed, sir, you must. It is necessary for you to return to the other side, to be once more habited as becomes your profession, to live, if you must remain for a while in this

place, with the gentlemen who are for the time your companions. Sir, if you refuse you will insult me. I shall believe that you mean to insult me. Sir, what have I done that you should insult a stranger?’

She took up the purse and again placed it in his hand.

‘Madam, I place my honour in your hands when I take this purse. Perhaps—nay, I know not how or when, or if it is possible—kind Heaven may one day give me the opportunity. Your honour is always safe in your own hands, but there may be a time—there may be: once a mouse delivered a lion.’

‘Sir, I am sure that if such a time were to come I should be able to depend upon you. Remember that on many occasions a woman has been saved by a gallant knight.’

He received the purse, but unwillingly. To take the lady’s money was to lower himself in his eyes. Yet he was poor and in rags, and had no means of buying the next meal; no bed and no blanket; no books and no occupation.

‘If, madam, I must take your money, at least let me know——’

‘My name? No, sir, best not to know. I have learned yours. Let me watch your course, myself unseen.’

‘Then, let me, only for once, see that lovely face. I know that it is lovely, because it is the home of pity. For once let me look upon it, if only that I may grave it upon my heart.’

The lady lifted her mask. The young man was right. Truly, it was a lovely face, and now it was glowing with pity and blushing with the shame of being found out in a kind action: her eyes, downcast, were full of tears: her cheek was humid with them: she looked like the very goddess of pity. The young man sank upon his knee: he

forgot his rags and his poverty, he forgot his bare legs and his bare feet, his shabby beard and his unkempt wig: he was a gentleman once more, and a gallant, and a worshipper of the sex. He took her hand and bent over it and kissed it, as a grateful gentleman should.

Just then Mrs. Brymer opened the door. 'May I come in?' she asked. The young man rose and retired a step. The dressmaker saw him, however, on his knees: she saw the purse in his hand, the lady without her mask, the tears in her eyes, and the too newly-born look of hope and joy in the face of the prisoner from the Poor side.

'Tut, tut!' she said. 'This is very unbusinesslike, madam,' she stooped and whispered. 'Take back your purse. Let me deal with him. Five shillings a week, and he will be dead in six months, and you will be free. Oh, you have suffered yourself to pity him! Shame! shame! Business knows no pity.' She stood up and sniffed violently to show her disapproval of methods quite obsolete in business.

'Mrs. Brymer,' said her debtor, 'there will be no business done between this young gentleman and myself.' She rose and held out her hand to the prisoner. 'Sir, I am sorry that I mistook your condition and your station. Forgive, I pray you, the nature of the proposal that was made to you. Meantime'—she pressed his hand with encouragement—'hope, dream of freedom, let your thoughts at least return to the Temple. It is but an advance—a trifling advance'—she dropped her voice to a whisper—'till you hear from me again.' She replaced the mask. 'Now, Mrs. Brymer,' she said, 'you have still another way: let us lose no time: let us go at once and adopt that other way. My heart has now become like

adamant, for hardness. Do not fear for me any more. Like steel or adamant or the nether millstone.'

As they went out she turned back. The prisoner was gazing after her stupidly. 'Sir, farewell. Or not farewell—to our next meeting. Perhaps, after all, you may some day—who knows?—save—who can tell?—even my reputation.'

CHAPTER III

A STRANGE MARRIAGE

IN the coach as they rolled away from the King's Bench Mrs. Brymer gave vent to her ill-humour and disappointment. 'I had done for you, madam,' she grumbled, 'what, I own, I could not have hoped to accomplish. I found for you that young fellow, born and brought up a gentleman, though as poor as Job, consuming away in the starvation and misery of the Poor side. He will be dead in a few months; he cannot possibly live longer. The place kills all but the poor wretches accustomed to rags and beggary. I found you, I say, a husband who would have left you a widow in six months, and free—quite free—from all your debts. There was a chance! And what did you do? Cried over him. You cried over him; you gave him money; you gave him cold beef and wine. That's what you did. It takes the heart out of a body. And what's the good when all's told? He will spend the money, and then the starving will begin again. No one else will ever give him any; no one goes to visit him—he told you so; he has no friends; then he must sell his shoes and stockings again; then he must starve; then he will die; then he will be laid in St. George's Churchyard, and you not a whit the better. Madam, you make me sick and sorry.'

‘You said you had another way, Mrs. Brymer. The thought of that other way softened my heart towards the poor young gentleman.’

‘Poor young gentleman!’ Mrs. Brymer snorted and sniffed. ‘Poor young swindler! poor young thief! poor young footpad! Why, the fellow has got credit for twenty-five guineas without any means of paying, and now the unfortunate tradesman must suffer. And you say, “Poor young gentleman!”’

‘You will acknowledge that putting him into prison does not increase his power of paying. Would it not be better to let him out and to trust to his honour to earn the money and pay as soon as he can?’

‘Madam, the man who does not pay his bills ought to be locked up for life; it is the least and the fairest punishment due to such a crime. Even then it isn’t half enough. He ought to be whipped once a week at the cart’s tail; he ought to be sent to the Plantations and made to work bareheaded in the sun beside the niggers; he ought to be hanged—every week we hang poor wretches not half so bad as this man who will not pay his debts! No punishment is bad enough for such a one!’—all the shopkeeper appeared in her angry words, in her flaming face, in her hot wrath—‘for the tradesman, look you, is dependent on the credit he gives. He must give it; he must trust his customers’ honour. If that fails him, do you think he will find grace or favour with those who have trusted him, the wholesale merchants, the gentlemen in black velvet and gold buttons who look so pious and talk so smug? Not so—not so. They will exact the letter of the law. Why did I write to you? Why, but on account of those who press me? There is no friendship, I tell you again, in business—no compassion and no consideration.’

‘But I am not in business, Mrs. Brymer, therefore I may have compassion, on myself, as well as on that young man.’

Mrs. Brymer went on regardless of the interruption.

‘The tradesman must pay ; he must pay, and on the day, else he must go bankrupt. When he is bankrupt, what is there before him but the prison ? No allowance ; no excuse ; no granting of time any more than for the lying gentleman who hath brought him to this dreadful pass.’

‘Would it not be better to let him remain outside to earn some money and to pay when he can ?’

Mrs. Brymer went on without replying to this pertinent question.

‘Think what bankruptcy means. The man is in prison ; he cannot earn anything. The wife is left with her helpless children ; she cannot earn anything ; the children cannot earn anything. The grudging relations dole out every shilling with words of reproach and contempt ; the family have lost their reputation ; they have lost their friends ; the boys cannot be apprenticed like their father and their grandfather before them ; they must become servants all their lives, unless they enlist and follow the colours, or go out to the Plantations, where they will be little better than negro slaves ; the girls cannot marry—nay, they cannot learn housewifery ; they are much beneath the notice of honest tradesmen, and are yet above the craftsmen ; they are exposed to the dangers and temptations of the wicked town. Think of them when they go to church. Formerly they had their own pew, and walked out after the quality, respected and envied ; now they sit unconsidered in the benches among the charity children and the almswomen and the servants,

ashamed and scorned. Madam'—she stopped and took breath—'you know not, believe me, how dreadful a thing bankruptcy is to a respectable tradesman of the City, nor how it drags down him and his family, and makes them the most miserable of mortals. You have compassion on that young gentleman in the King's Bench; you give him money and food. It is very well; you are not in trade. I declare, madam, truthfully, that I should like to flog that young gentleman who is so free with his knees, and his mumbling and mouthing over ladies' hands, and his kisses—ay, to flog him from the Temple to London Bridge and back again. I would do it myself. I would lay it on with a will, joyfully I would—joyfully I would!'

In this mood she continued while the hackney coach rumbled over the narrow way of London Bridge, and presently down Cheapside and Fleet Street till it came to Newgate.

'Well,' she said, when at length the coach stopped before the heavy portals of the gaol, 'there is one more chance for you. I propose now to marry you to a villain who will be hanged in a week. It is a come-down. To marry a broken lawyer of the Temple would have been better if it came to be talked about. And he would have been dead in a few months! Dear! dear! He would have been dead so soon! And you must spoil all by your compassion.'

'But you promised it should not be talked about,' cried Isabel in alarm.

'It shall not. But certain things must be done: your creditors must be informed of the transfer; they must learn that the debts are now due by one who is condemned to die. They will rage, they will curse and swear, they will weep—poor wretches!—they will weep and wring their

hands. Perhaps they will seek your lodging, in order to upbraid you. Yet you are within the law and can defy them. Change your lodgings, madam, for a time. Let the thing blow over.'

'But you said that no one would know.'

'No one of any importance. The draper of Ludgate Hill will run round and tell the other shopkeepers. What will they care? You owe them nothing. Your name will be heard and forgotten. They have lost nothing. Do you think they feel any pity for an unfortunate brother in trade? Not so. Madam, again I say there is no friendship, there is no compassion, there are no excuses, in business. If one goes under, there is one the fewer among the rivals. What matters how the poor man talks? No one will heed, no one will listen; and then he will shut his shop and send home his 'prentices, and he will sink and be no more seen. A man who is a bankrupt is like a stone dropped into a pond: there is at first a circle round the spot where it fell; then the circle will roll away, and there is nothing. If your draper becomes a bankrupt, he will make a circle of talk for a day or two; then there will be silence. From the depths, from the starving garret, from the prison, there is no more sound or utterance than from the bottom of the pond or from the grave. Madam, you are quite safe; no one will know.'

Isabel shuddered. Her conscience smote her sore for the mischief she had done. But despite the scourge of conscience, she had to save herself. She looked out of the window at the dreary portals of the prison. The door, studded with square iron nails, stood wide open as if to admit a whole army of felons. A stream of people were going in and coming out; they were chiefly of the lowest kind—foul in clothes and in conversation, ragged and

dirty, and uncombed. These were the friends of the prisoners. Mrs. Brymer gave the name of the prisoner she wanted to see—one Adolphus Truxo. The turnkey looked at the masked lady with some curiosity, and smiled. Perhaps he knew very well the errand on which she came. They passed through the gate and found themselves in a small room where a woman felt their pockets—it was a mere form—and let them through. They were now in a corridor from which a grated door opened into a square court, crowded with people—the prisoners and their friends. There was a strangely cold, damp, and clammy feeling in the air, with a sour and sickly smell.

Mrs. Weyland looked through the grating upon the crowd. A few of the women were crying; some of the men were laughing; some of them were staggering about, drunk with beer; some sat on the stone bench that ran round the wall, huddled up in misery and despair; they were waiting for their trial, which would probably mean removal to the condemned cell. They had no friends to bring them food and drink; they were half starved on the prison pittance of a penny loaf a day. Isabel looked through the grating; she would have spent the whole day gazing at the miserable crowd, but Mrs. Brymer touched her arm.

‘Come,’ she said; ‘our man is not here.’

They passed along the corridor, and presently arrived at a long and narrow court with buildings on one side and a high wall on the other. ‘Twas like a grave, and the air was such as one would expect in a grave—closer and more fetid than in the other court, because smaller. Here were about a dozen men and boys in irons clanking up and down the stone pavement. Their visitors—some twenty or thirty in number—had brought them beer and food; they were mostly drinking. None of them seemed in the

least impressed with their awful position; there was not the least sign of dejection, penitence, remorse, or terror. Had they been sheep, with no souls to be saved or lost, they could not have approached the shambles with greater insensibility.

The turnkey nodded to Mrs. Brymer; he nodded and laughed because he had seen her already and he knew the errand on which she came.

‘We are tolerably full just now,’ he said; ‘ninety we tried the other day. Twelve are cast for execution—here they are, your man among them, madam. By the Lord! a fine fellow, too, to be anatomized by the surgeons.’

‘They don’t seem to mind it.’

‘Humph! Perhaps they don’t like it, though you wouldn’t think so. But what’s the use of snivelling? What tries them most—they find it out then—is when the irons are struck off and the rope ties their elbows behind their back. Just now it’s all beer, and they swagger and swear, crying “Who the devil cares?” and “Every man must die once,” and “What odds whether ’tis now or in ten years’ time?”’

‘Oh!’ Isabel was overpowered with the terror of the place. Indeed, it seemed to her as if Death himself, a frightful skeleton with grinning jaws, carrying a dart in his hand, was stalking up and down the court, sentinel over the prisoners, and that they saw him plainly, but pretended not to see, save that now and again their faces would suddenly become pale and serious, their ribald voices would become silent, and a cold and clammy moisture would break out upon their foreheads. Yes, they saw him; then they could not choose but see him. ‘It is a terrible place! Oh, Mrs. Brymer, take me away! Must we stay here long?’

‘Not long. I thought you would be afraid. Why, child, there is nothing here can hurt you save the horrid stench and reek. I told the parson I would send for him if we wanted him.’ She spoke to the turnkey, who grinned.

‘Ay, ay,’ he said. ‘That is what you want, is it? I thought so. Well, one of these visitors will run your errand for you.’ Mrs. Brymer wrote a few words on a paper. ‘Yes, yes; we all know the parsons of the Fleet. If one won’t come, another will. They’d marry the devil, and that joyfully, for a guinea. Here, you boy!’—he called one of the lads who sat stupidly waiting for the pot to be finished, in order to take it back to the tavern—‘do you want to earn a shilling? Run round to the Fleet Market. Can you read? Then, ask for Parson Gaynham. Tell him to come here at once. If he is engaged or drunk, call another. Come back with a parson and you shall have the shilling. Run, ye young limb! I’ll look after your pot. ’Tis Truxo, is it? Well, he’ll be hanged next week. A lusty fellow! Pity to hang a man so strong! There’s one who won’t snivel at the last, and he won’t bluster and swagger; I know his sort. He’ll go in the cart without showing that he is either sorry or afraid. Looks like the devil, too! I think that he verily is first-cousin to the devil——’

Mrs. Brymer turned to her companion. ‘Madam,’ she said, ‘it is but a step to the Fleet Market. The parson is always ready. Next sit down and recover your spirits;’ for Isabel trembled and shook. ‘These pigs cannot hurt you. Pah! the place and the company are alike foul and stifling! What does it matter if they are all to be hanged next week? A good riddance, truly!’

‘Which is the man?’ asked Isabel, gazing around

her more curiously, as she became accustomed to the scene.

‘Madam, does it matter which is the man? I have already spoken to him. Believe me, you will have no trouble with him. He is ready and eager. Only, madam, I entreat you, not a word of pity—if you please. It is your only chance. Remember that you must be free, and that the fellow is a wretch of the deepest dye and that he has to be hanged o’ Monday. You will only meet him this once—just to go through the ceremony with him. Then we shall come away. The parson will give you the marriage certificate, which you must keep carefully, because you may possibly want it. Don’t think about anything else. For the rest, I charge myself. I will go to Ludgate Hill and inform the draper that the debt is transferred to one Adolphus Truxo, now in Newgate; you had better change your lodging for awhile, as I said before, to prevent a visit from the unfortunate man. As for me, you must pay over the whole of your debt to me; and I shall ask nothing more of you—save the continuance of your custom, which I shall have the right of asking, after all I have done for you. There is not another dressmaker in London would have taken all this trouble out of pure kindness.’

Isabel understood very little of this discourse. She sat down on the stone bench at the end of the court and trembled, feeling sick and faint and sorry. She could not keep her thoughts from the man who had implored her to pay his bill; nor from the bankruptcy and the misery brought upon a whole family by her own extravagance and folly; nor from the ruined home and the loss of all that makes life happy to the mother and the wife; nor from the cruel fate of the children, deprived of their advantages

by such a blow. It would have been well had she understood, at the outset, what her extravagance might mean to these poor people. And before her this group of wretches masqueraded with their pretended cheerfulness and their terrible callousness, sodden with drink, maintaining a ghastly show of merriment as if they were in a tavern parlour. Her heart sank very low; had she seen any way of safety short of that one way, she would have jumped at the deliverance. Alas! she was constrained to save herself by the ruin of this man who had trusted her, by the ignoble and infamous method of transferring her debts to a miserable wretch who was waiting for execution. She sighed heavily. Under her mask the tears flowed down her cheek. They were tears of shame and self-reproach.

‘Yes,’ said Mrs. Brymer, watching her, and divining her thoughts, ‘it would have looked better to take the lawyer. This plan is undoubtedly the safest; the lawyer might have lingered on for a year or two—though we could have kept him short and so brought him to an end. Now, by coming here, you are free in a week. As for the place and the creature and the means, what do they matter? Courage, madam!’

‘Oh, that I should free myself by the infamy of a man that I must call husband! I should never be able to think of Tyburn without feeling that I belong to it. Oh, the shame of it!’

‘Nonsense, madam! The freedom of it! And here comes his reverence. Bear up and behave with courage.’

The clergyman was dressed as an ecclesiastic in prosperous circumstances. Indeed, the fees were abundant, and his services were in constant request, especially for those who would make a clandestine marriage in order to escape

the wedding festivities. His cassock was of silk ; his wig was well kept and recently out of the barber's hands ; his ruffles were clean and white, if not of such costly lace as adorns the wrists of a bishop ; his hands were spotless. His face, to be sure, was not marked by those outward signs of piety which we find on some clergymen ; yet their absence is not in itself so rare as to be remarkable. Truth to say, it was a red face—even at times purple : in figure he was a big man, tall and stout, even corpulent : he rolled as he walked : he moved with the dignity of a City Rector : he spoke as one who had authority, with a loud full voice : in his voice, indeed, there was a kind of rich and mellow fruitiness which made one think—I know not why—of old port, with punch and mulled claret. He knew the turnkey and nodded familiarly ; he would, indeed, presently share with him a portion of his fees : he looked round the court with an eye of superior contempt, as if he expected something better than the common run. He whispered the turnkey, and laughed when he had an answer.

He was accompanied by his servant, who walked after him carrying two books. The varlet had an impudent leer in his eye, and a permanent grin upon his ugly face, which he had acquired by touting on Fleet Bridge and Ludgate Hill for his master : he was dressed in a drugget waistcoat with sleeves : he wore his own hair cut short and sticking out upon his head like a scrubbing-brush ; a pen was stuck behind his ear, and an ink-horn was in his waistcoat pocket. He had no hat, but the time was June and the day was warm.

Mrs. Brymer rose to meet the divine.

‘Sir,’ she said, ‘I am glad that you were not engaged—though my notice was abrupt. With you, at least, we shall be safe.’

‘Madam, with me you are quite safe—quite safe; not even the Archbishop could make you safer. As for engagements, I have many. This very day I have to preach at St. Paul’s. The Lord Mayor and the Aldermen and Sheriffs will be there.’ (It will be understood that strict truth was not one of the virtues of his reverence.) ‘But when a lady—a lady—is in the case, you, Mrs. Brymer, or another——’

The dressmaker indicated her companion.

‘Ah, I understand. I feared at first that the credit of my old friend, Mrs. Brymer . . . Ah, yes—very good! Where this lady, I say, is concerned, the Dean and Chapter—nay, the Lord Mayor, the Aldermen, the Sheriffs, and the Common Council—may go hang. Such, madam, is my respect—my devotion to the sex.’

‘We shall not keep you many minutes, sir, in this stinking place.’

‘The fee,’ croaked the clerk in a grating voice, ‘is one guinea. Paid beforehand.’

‘I understand,’ the parson continued, ‘that a hasty marriage—a marriage of love—is to be contracted at once between . . . this lady?’

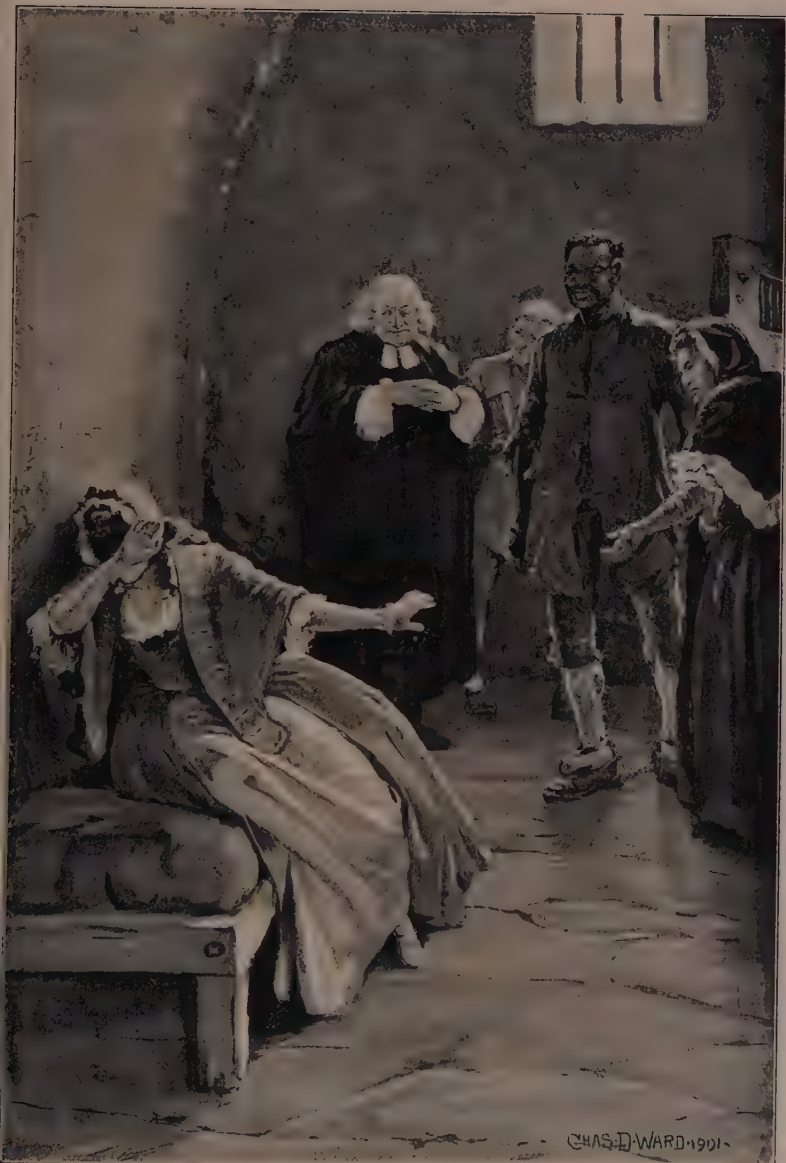
‘The certificate is five shillings extra’—from the servant.

‘This is the lady. We will proceed at once,’ said Mrs. Brymer.

‘The clerk’s fee is half a crown,’ added the servant.

‘Sir, if you will come with me, we will use one of the cells. I will at once bring you the—the bridegroom.’

‘Faugh! How the place stinks! I doubt we shall all get gaol-fever. Come, madam, let us dispatch—which of these gallant but unfortunate gentlemen is the happy—the fortunate—the thrice fortunate swain?’



'NO—NO—NEVER—NEVER!'

Mrs. Brymer made no answer, but led the way, followed by the parson and his clerk, and supporting the trembling steps of the bride. Some brides tremble with excessive shyness or modesty; this lady, who had been through the ceremony once, and then felt no shyness, trembled with shame and self-reproach. The people stood aside, gazing stupidly at them; in this courtyard anything might happen.

Mrs. Brymer took them into one of the cells; here reigned a dismal twilight from a narrow grating ten feet high; the room was shaped like a decanter with polished walls of cement, so that escape was impossible. The only furniture was a couple of narrow truckle-beds, with mattresses and blankets.

Mrs. Brymer ushered the party into this cheerful abode and then retired. In a few moments she reappeared, bringing with her a man in irons. And at sight of the man Mrs. Weyland shrieked, and threw herself upon one of the beds.

‘Heavens!’ she cried. ‘No—no—never—never!’

For the man was a huge great fellow over six feet high, with the shoulders and chest of a gladiator; and he was a full-blood black negro.

There are, as everyone knows, among negroes two kinds of blackness: one is the shiny blackness which catches and reflects the light—a cheerful blackness; the other is a blackness which absorbs the light and gives none back. The latter was the blackness of this man. His wool curled all over his head as black as his skin; his eyeballs were white, his eyes shone in the twilight like the eyes of the devil; he grinned and showed teeth as white as ivory.

‘There!’ said Mrs. Brymer, bestowing no attention upon

the woman on the bed. 'There, my man, is your bride waiting for you.'

'No—I could not—I could not,' the bride repeated, moaning.

'Madam, pardon me! You must either marry this man or you go home to be arrested this very day. Take your choice. Why,' she whispered, 'what odds if he does look like the devil? What odds if he is the devil? He is to be hanged o' Monday. Stand up,' she added roughly. 'Leave off crying, and don't play the fool. You are not a schoolgirl. The man can't hurt you.'

'Madam!' the parson admonished her blandly. 'Allow me a word. This, believe me, is not the place for hysterics or for vapours. Every moment spent here increases the danger of gaol-fever. Come, let us not waste time. I am here to marry you. A very proper man he is, too, if a trifle dark in complexion. I may already, I fear, have contracted this terrible fever. Am I to go without my fees, or will your ladyship stand up and be married without any more fuss?'

Mrs. Weyland clutched her adviser by the hand.

'You will carry me away after the—the ceremony—immediately after?'

'Surely, surely. Be under no alarm; you are quite safe.'

Mrs. Weyland stood up. In her anxiety and terror she dropped her mask, but no one seemed to notice.

A strange place for a wedding! One might as well be married in a tomb; or—with all these poor lost souls carousing, fighting, crying, laughing, blaspheming around—in—— The woman who was brought there to be married could not give words to the thought. The cold dark place, with its fetid breath, was filled with whispers

and voices from the dead—the dead who had died a shameful and a horrible death. The place was nothing but a halt, a rest, between the court of sentence and the place of execution. Above the voices of the callous roisterers there arose the stifled groans and moans and sighs of the miserable convicts. Above the drunken bravado of the poor wretches who kept up a show of indifference to the end, this woman heard the lamentations of despair; instead of wedding-bells she heard the clinking of the irons; instead of the village children scattering flowers, there was the hoarse laughter of the women, half drunk, and the ribald jests of the men whose lives were to end in a few hours. Surely there was never such a wedding! And lower and lower still sank the heart of the bride.

‘Madam’—Mrs. Brymer held her by the arm—‘courage. Do not gaze about you; forget where you are. ’Twill be finished in five minutes. ’Tis but an empty form. What matter for the place? What matter for the man?’

Then the Marriage Service was begun. The parson stood with his back to the wall. On the right hand was the clerk ready to make the responses. Before him stood the bride with her friend, Mrs. Brymer. Opposite was the stalwart negro. The clerk pulled and pushed him into his proper place.

‘Stand there,’ he said, ‘and do what I tell you, and hold your tongue except when I bid you speak.’

The man obeyed stupidly, keeping his eyes fixed on the woman he was about to marry. It was a strange and a hungry look—such a look as a mere mortal might have had who met Aphrodite herself in a forest glade, and was at first struck with amazement and with rapture. For this black man had never before seen so close a woman of

beauty so surpassing; of a colour, white and red, so wonderful. He was about to marry her, and in his bemused brain there were surging strange thoughts about leaving her in order to be hanged. Pity! shame! to hang a man just married, and to such a wife! He said nothing, but in the twilight of the cell his eyes were like balls of fire, and his white teeth gleamed, and these signs of emotion remained in the memory of the bride. The service was short. The introductory discourse was omitted. The minister put the question to the bridegroom, 'Wilt thou have this woman to thy wedded wife?' with the other words.

'Say "I will," man,' said the clerk.

'Why,' the bridegroom replied, 'I said I would—if there was drink enough.'

The minister put the question to the woman. She stood dumb, and trembled.

'Say "I will,"' whispered Mrs. Brymer.

The clergyman did not want any more. He went on placing the woman's hand in the man's with the words prescribed. The negro's great hand was cold and clammy, but it closed round the woman's little hand with a dreadful assertion of ownership. The clerk responded for the bridegroom, Mrs. Brymer for the bride.

Then the clerk loosed their hands.

'Where's the ring?' he asked.

'What ring?' replied the man.

The clerk felt in his waistcoat pocket and produced a brass ring which might have done duty for a curtain. The clergyman received it on the book, and gave it to the bridegroom, whose hand was guided by the clerk while he put it on the fourth finger of the left hand. Then, the clerk saying the words after him, for this animal who

could only stare stupidly at his bride, the clergyman read the form :

‘With this ring I thee wed . . .’

He omitted the prayer which follows in the Order prescribed. Perhaps it was as well ; perhaps the omission was a sign of grace. He joined their right hands together, and said :

‘Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder.’ And then without further words he concluded the service : ‘I pronounce that they be man and wife together.’

So he released their hands and closed the book. ‘Now, madam,’ he said, ‘you are duly and legally married. I wish you every happiness. And as for you, my man, I wish you a long rope for the better enjoyment of the honeymoon.’

But the bride fell fainting on the truckle-bed.

‘Now,’ said Mrs. Brymer, ‘let us finish as quickly as may be. Your certificate, if you please, sir. Here are the fees, and this is the name of the bride. Fill it in without delay. We stifle in this stinking place. So—thank you. Madam, your mask has fallen off. Better put it on again. You, fellow’—she turned to the bridegroom—‘you shall have what you want, and as much as you want ; what shall it be, beer or rum ?’

‘Make your mark here,’ said the clerk.

‘Rum,’ he replied with a grin. ‘Plenty rum. Buckets of rum !’

‘It is forbidden, I believe, in the prison ; but there are ways. Well, you shall have it. We will keep faith with you. Ha, you are lucky ! You are, I believe, to be turned off on Monday next ; and to-day is Wednesday. Well, you shall have your rum—as much as you can drink

for those five days. You shall even go drunk to Tyburn. A lucky fellow indeed ! 'Thank your stars that I found you here.'

She raised her friend, who was still in a feeble and fainting condition, and led her out into the court, where the air was perhaps a little fresher.

'Come,' she said ; 'it is done now, and there is no more to be said. On Monday next you will be free.'

The parson and his man, the fees having been duly paid, followed, getting out of the infected place as quickly as possible. The negro, by name Adolphus Truxo, stood at the door of the cell and watched them as they went away, the crowd parting right and left.

'I saw her face,' he murmured. It is said that above all men the negro is most moved by the beauty of a white woman. Slave-owners are all agreed upon this point. 'I saw her face,' this negro murmured. Perhaps for the first time he remembered his coming doom with regret.

There came out of the crowd a young woman. Could one have taken her away, washed her and dressed her in a neat and becoming fashion, she might have been comely. She was, however, as unwashed and unkempt as most of the women in the court. As for her dress, it was composed of nothing but a thick skirt of some rough stuff, discoloured with droppings of beer, tallow candles, drippings of meat and fat pork, and all kinds of nameless stuff. She wore above her skirt the black leather stays common to her class—they are called loose jumps—and above the jumps a small shawl tied round her neck, and covering her shoulders and part of her red arms ; her hair hung over her shoulders in rats' tails ; she was barefooted ; her face was red with much beer.

'Sam,' she said, thus abridging his Christian name of

Adolphus, 'she is gone, then. Did you marry her, Sam? What did she give you?'

'I saw her face,' said the negro.

'I don't care if you did. What did she give you?'

The man made no answer. He was thinking of the lady's face.

'Is she coming back again, Sam?'

He still made no answer.

'If she does, I'll break every bone in her body, and swing for it—happy, I will. For I'm your lawful wife, Sam; I'm your wife. You can't deny it.'

The man pulled himself together.

'There's rum coming, Doll,' he said—'buckets of rum. That's what I get by this wedding.'

'But I'm your wife, Sam; I'm your true and lawful wife.'

The man turned and looked at her. The emotions of a negro's mind are hard to read upon a negro's face. The blackness covers and hides all. Perhaps a disgust fell upon him in comparing this poor common creature with the woman whose face was still in his mind. He lifted his big hand, with his big strong arm. It was as if he lightly touched her cheek, or brushed away the falling locks, or as if the wind of his action blew upon her face. But the woman fell. She got up again immediately, without a cry or a word of remonstrance. Her left eye was black for a fortnight afterwards. But he had knocked her down. Only a husband would have dared to knock down Doll. There are women who permit these familiarities to their husbands. They are not exactly proofs of affection, but they are proofs of the conjugal tie. Had any other man knocked Doll down, the advance would have been received with spirit and retaliatory vigour. But it was

her husband. There had been a ceremony of some significance in the cell. It was natural that the bigamist's first wife should be curious on the subject—even, in spite of proofs or oaths of conjugal fidelity, that the first wife should be jealous; even though the second wife went away at once; even though the next Monday would end both marriages. Therefore to be knocked down by her husband was reassuring. Doll was no longer jealous. Not to be jealous, with some women, is to be happy. Doll rose smiling and prepared to receive the rum, price of a bigamous ceremony and the simulation of a marriage.

CHAPTER IV

RETIREMENT

So they left this abode of lost souls and souls doomed to be lost, and drove away, Isabel still white and trembling, her face buried in her hands. Mrs. Brymer regarded her with a sniff of contempt. Had she not got rid of that burden of debt once for all? What price too great to pay in order to shift such a burden upon another pair of shoulders?

‘So, madam!’ she said, as the coach grumbled along rattling its windows; ‘since the business is over and done with, what do we want with tears and tremblings?’

‘Alas! I am no longer the widow of Ronald Weyland. I am the wife of Adolphus Truxo, negro, convict, robber, murderer—who knows what?’

‘You will be his widow as well on Monday morning, after he has driven in state to Tyburn. Come, madam, I confess that for a lady of delicacy the condemned cells of Newgate are not a pleasing place’—Isabel groaned and winced—‘especially when connected with the solemnization of marriage, when one expects the cleaver and marrow-bones at least, with the ringing of the bells and the marriage feast. To be sure, in such a case as yours the bridegroom is always a creature—faugh!’ Isabel caught her by the wrist. ‘I say no more, madam. The smell of

the place clings to one's clothes. Pray Heaven we 'scape the fever! Let us not speak of the man. My heart bleeds for you, madam. But that is all over. Four or five days only to wait. You can think of him sitting with his bottle of rum. Such wretches are consoled for any misfortune by a bottle of rum. You may flog him at the cart-tail . . . Indeed, I have seen——'

'Hush, Mrs. Brymer, pray! I cannot bear it, indeed. Do not ever again, I implore and entreat you, so much as name that poor wretch.'

'I will not—why should I? After Monday there will be no longer any Adolphus Truxo. His soul, if he has a soul, which I doubt, holding that the negro is like a brute beast in that respect, will be in its own place, quite apart and separate from the souls of us white folk, while his body, a bony atomy, will be hanging by a hook in Surgeons' Hall. No, madam, we will never mention that creature again. Nevertheless, he has done your ladyship a good turn. Forget him, forget him, as speedily as may be.'

To forget is not so easy as to advise forgetting. The memory of that ceremony remained. Meantime Isabel proceeded to perform her part of the contract; she paid the dressmaker's bill in full and at once; she also paid the parson's fees and the bridegroom's rum. Then she considered her position. After deducting these calls upon her slender purse, she found herself, for her whole stock, in possession of about £100 in money. She had also the wardrobe of a woman of fashion, with a certain amount of jewellery, lace, plate, and china. In a word, there was enough left to maintain her with frugality and in a modest manner for two years at least without asking help from anyone. Now, a young and charming widow, sprightly

in her manners, accomplished and well connected, ought to consider it possible to make another man happy within two years.

Isabel, however, began by doing a very foolish thing—a thing so foolish that she did not dare to communicate it to her friend the dressmaker. No one, I am sure, would believe that a woman in her desperate position would have done such a thing. I have said that she had no knowledge of arithmetic. Addition and subtraction were Greek or Hebrew to her understanding. Her purse, so long as one guinea clinked against another, was the purse of Fortunatus—a purse inexhaustible. Had she known, or had she learned, anything of the rapid wasting of money, she could never have done such a thing. There was, however, some excuse for her. She could not forget either the man with the irons—the man of the condemned cell—the man whom she had married; nor could she forget the poor unfortunate young gentleman of the King's Bench, the prisoner on the Poor side, confined for life because he could not pay twenty-five guineas, without friends and without the least ray of hope or consolation. The man with the irons now hung, doubtless, as Mrs. Brymer had so feelingly put it, on a hook in Surgeons' Hall, a 'bony atomy'; happily, there was no occasion or reason why she should remember or recall him, though at times, in the dead of night, she awoke and thought she saw his black ghost bending over her bed with white teeth and gleaming eyes. He was dead. The other was still living, and his presence was with her always, by day as well as by night. She saw before her continually this prisoner from the Poor side of the King's Bench; he was always present to her, with his rags, his lustrous eyes, his sharp and intellectual face, his friendlessness, his hopelessness, his musical voice,

his words and manner so incongruous with his position, and his pennilessness. It was a more than Moorish cruelty that kept such a man as this a prisoner.

The other man she could forget—sometimes ; yet the memory of him came unbidden. In the twilight, among the shadows, under the trees, in the darkness of midnight, she saw before her from time to time that great monster, that big hulk of a man—if he was a man—say, rather, that black devil, with eyes of flame and teeth of ivory, whose tail and hoofs were hidden—gazing hungrily as if he would devour her. As time went on, this vision would become less frequent, and perhaps would vanish altogether ; but the other memory—that of the debtor—remained with her, and she encouraged it to remain.

You shall hear what she did.

This young gentlewoman, who had no more than enough to maintain herself for a short time ; whose hopes of assistance from her own people were slender indeed ; who could hope nothing from her husband's people, though they were of exalted rank, actually sought out an attorney—be sure that she did not advise with Mrs. Brymer—and entrusted him with the task of releasing the unfortunate young lawyer. The attorney was passably honest ; he found out the meagreness of her resources ; he probably attributed her pity to a softer emotion ; he was so good, in short, as actually to study the interests of his client before his own profit. He persuaded the detaining creditor—there was but one—to take two-thirds of the debt in full discharge, and—what was more difficult—the attorney in the case to abate a quarter of his claim by letting him understand that it was his only chance of getting anything. In the end, and after a day or two, Mr. Oliver Macnamara, of the Poor side in the King's

Bench, found himself once more a free man, clad as a lawyer should be, free of debt, and with a few guineas jingling in his pocket.

The annals of the King's Bench and the Fleet are full of surprises of this nature. Now it is a charitable man who sends to the prison and releases so many poor prisoners whose debts are under so much; now it is a compassionate woman who dies, and leaves money for the release of debtors. Easter offerings, Christmas gifts, take the form of release for so many poor prisoners. It is even reported that before these holy seasons the turnkeys supply themselves with additional poor prisoners, who are introduced for the purpose of sharing in the gifts—an indulgence for which they pay the turnkeys. Thus is charity abused.

It is further reported that in every prison there are histories, traditions, and legends, showing how ladies—even Princesses—have fallen in love with young prisoners, and have taken them out of durance, paying their debts, and marrying them. Is there not the leading case of Forster in the Ludgate Prison? And there are other stories how gallant young gentlemen—even noblemen—have found brides among the prisoners of the Fleet and the King's Bench.

We may not, however, suffer ourselves to be carried away by too much credence in these stories, which seem invented for the consolation of the afflicted by that indomitable daughter of the Sun, named Hope. In the same way it is reported that poor girls of every rank and station whisper to each other wild legends concerning the power of Love the leveller, who brings along the Prince and weds him to the serving-girl.

You may imagine, however, the surprise with which

Mr. Oliver Macnamara, who certainly had no belief in these legends and founded no hopes upon things most unlikely, received the attorney who brought him his freedom.

‘Sir,’ said the attorney, ‘I bring you news.’

‘What news, sir?’

‘There is but one piece of news which you desire, young gentleman—I bring you your freedom.’

Then for a moment the walls of the prison seemed to be rolling about, as if they would fall down, like the walls of Jericho. The prisoner stared aghast; the words were like an impossible dream.

‘I repeat, sir,’ the attorney continued, ‘that I bring you your freedom.’

‘My freedom!’ echoed the prisoner.

‘All the arrangements are concluded. You have now only to walk out of the prison. Your detaining creditor is satisfied; the costs of his attorney are discharged. I have to place in your hands a small sum of money; you will sign the receipt, if you please.’

‘Stay, sir, stay! There is some terrible mistake. I have no friends who can pay for my release.’

‘I said not that you have friends. I said only that I have brought you your freedom.’

‘I do not understand.’

‘Tut, tut, sir! What matters whether you understand or not? The fact is that the doors are thrown open. You can walk out—you can begin the world anew.’

‘Begin the world anew.’ He repeated the words; he looked round him. He had spent no more than three or four months in the place, yet it had become to him, as to all the unhappy prisoners, the only world possible. ‘Begin the world anew.’ He shivered. The world outside had

become a place of great danger and full of pitfalls. To begin anew . . . the prison became suddenly a place of refuge.

‘Ay, begin again. What? You have been here no more than a few weeks. It’s an episode, an incident, a disagreeable chapter in your life. You are young. I hear that you are a scholar as well as a lawyer. What more can you want?’

‘Nay, sir, nay. It is this prison which makes cowards of us all. Yes, I am young; I will begin again. Sir, to whom am I indebted?’

‘My client does not choose to have her name mentioned.’

‘You speak of *her* name? It is, then, a woman—a woman! Can it be the lady who came here a fortnight ago, and spoke words of gentle compassion?’

‘Perhaps, perhaps. It is a heart full of compassion.’

‘But she was in difficulties herself. How could she pay my debts? She herself wanted help.’

‘Perhaps, perhaps.’

‘She had but little money—I know so much. There were her own necessities. Sir, I am convinced, nevertheless, that it is this lady. Please tell her . . . no . . . words cannot tell her. There are some things for which gratitude hath no words, which can never be repaid. Tell her only that I seek not to know her name, since it is her pleasure to remain unknown.’

‘I will tell her what you wish.’

‘Then tell her, besides, that there may come a time when she may want the services of a faithful servant; if that time should ever come, she will know where to find me. She shall command all my mind, all my soul, all my strength, all my thoughts. If that time should never arrive, she will perhaps feel some sense of protection in the thought that such a servant is at her beck and call.

Tell her, besides, all that you can think that expresses gratitude and obligation.'

'I shall tell her, young gentleman, whatever you tell me. It is not my duty, as an attorney, to invent a language of gratitude. Now, sir, if you will come with me, the last formalities shall be observed, and we will step into the freedom of the street.'

In this way Mr. Oliver Macnamara regained his liberty, and was enabled to resume the exercise of his profession, thus interrupted at the outset by what promised to be a fatal bar to all his hopes. A vain man might have imagined that the lady was in love with him ; but ladies in love do not hide themselves behind an attorney in black cloth. Oliver was not a vain man ; he understood that the act was purely a work of charity and tender pity, one of those acts in which the left hand knows not what the right hand is doing.

He walked out of the prison ; his eyes were humid, his heart was full ; he wrung the hand of the attorney as if he had been an old friend. He hastened to make such changes in his costume as once more proclaimed his calling. He listened with satisfaction to the music of the guineas in his pocket, and he returned to the Temple, where his chambers still remained for him, because he had been absent no more than two or three months in all. He was ready to resume work as soon as it offered. It is pleasing to add that the first brief came from the attorney who had released him ; if that worthy person did not invent a language of gratitude, at least he could continue the work of benevolence.

This important business arranged, and the ghost of the ragged prisoner thus consigned to the Red Sea, Isabel proceeded with her own affairs. She could no longer

belong to the world of fashion. One leaves this world without farewells and without notice. Henceforth Isabel's face would be no longer seen at the card-table, the Assembly, the Rout, the Masquerade, the Theatre, or the Park. In a week or two there would be a word of curiosity as to what had become of her; then silence. She would be as much forgotten as a Toast of Nineveh or a Beauty from the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. Isabel dropped out of the circles in which without money to spend and to lose there is no living.

She then converted all her possessions except such as were necessary into money—her ribbons, laces, gloves, hoods, jewels, jewel and patch boxes, her silver candlesticks and spoons; most of her dresses, some of them very fine; her late husband's books and pictures—she sent everything to Mrs. Brymer, who sold them for her, and I dare say made a reasonable profit for herself. Why not? Business knows no friendship. At last she found herself reduced to a modest wardrobe, without a maid, with no encumbrances or impediments in the shape of portable property, and with a slender stock of some seventy or eighty guineas, with which to keep herself until something should be sent to her by Providence. And as Elijah sat beside the brook Cherith while the ravens brought him food, so Isabel sat beside the Heath at Hampstead and waited for the arrival of her ravens. You shall learn how they came to her. If we believe in a benevolent Providence, we cannot choose but believe that ravens may be sent to us in these the latter days, as well as to Elijah the prophet.

A purse of seventy or eighty guineas. It is not much for a woman who has managed to expend £4,000 in two years. One may resolve not to spend money,

but the habit of spending without consideration remains. There are two main divisions of the human race ; the first, and by far the more numerous, consists of those with whom a guinea turns into a sixpence as soon as it enters their hands ; these are the unfortunates who anticipate their money, are always in debt, always borrowing, for whom no income suffices, who fill the debtors' prisons, who buy things that they do not want, promise but never perform, enter into contracts which they do not keep, become security for each other, ruin themselves and rail at Fortune, and, above all, never understand that there are only two sixpences in a shilling, and only twenty-one shillings in a guinea.

The other sort is the rarer kind, in whose hand every sixpence becomes a guinea. These are the people who grow great and strong : for them the little shop becomes the great warehouse : theirs are the white sails flying across the ocean : they add farm to farm and acre to acre : they found the new families and they prop up the old. If Isabel belonged to the former tribe, her brother, I believe, belonged to the latter. We have little indeed to do with her brother, but his case shows us how in the same family there may be representatives of both classes.

Isabel, then, following the advice of Mrs. Brymer, changed her lodgings and retired to the country retreat of Hampstead, the village with a spa, assembly-rooms, and gay company, lying no more than four miles north of Covent Garden. Perhaps the medicinal qualities of the spa were no longer so much believed in as formerly : yet there were still many persons who drank its waters every day. The village was as popular and as much frequented in the summer as ever : the people came from the City by coach, arriving in the morning and going back at night : or they

walked up the hill in companies armed with clubs and swords to keep off highwaymen and footpads: or they took lodgings and stayed in the place for a month or six weeks at a time. The gardens were open all day long; there were groves and coppices full of warbling birds; the wild and broken heath stretched out on either hand to Hendon on the west, and Highgate on the east: it is a solitary and lonely place, so solitary and so lonely that not even a tramp or a footpad is to be feared upon it—nothing worse than a gipsy tent or encampment with a swarm of brown children, bright-eyed, half naked, talking their unknown gibberish; a place for a poet's meditation, where he will be undisturbed all day long and all the year round: a place where, in summer, he may cast himself down in the shadow of a wild crab-apple, with the fern leaves for bed and pillow, and listen to the lark in the sky or the nightingale from the wood, while the cool fresh breeze fans his cheek and the clouds race over his head across the deep blue. Or, if the company is very good, there is the Assembly which is held twice every week: there is the music which is played every evening in the Long Room: there are the card-rooms over the Long Room, where may be found every game of fashion played for moderate stakes: there are public breakfasts: there are private performances on the horns: there are public dinners: there are excellent taverns—Jack Straw's Castle, so called after that celebrated rebel; the Flask; the Spaniard; the Wells Tavern, and many others. For such a woman as Isabel, the fresh air, the amusements, the cheerful company, together with the solitude when she preferred to be alone, made Hampstead the most delightful spot that she would find. Here, at least, she was far removed from every association that could remind her of the past. Her creditors could not

follow or insult her here: the shame of the King's Bench proposal was not known at Hampstead. Newgate was out of sight, and the crowd of Tyburn was out of hearing. But for a long time she could not lay that persistent ghost of the huge black man, whose cold and clammy hand had held her own. At times she would feel his great fingers closing round her hand: then she was fain to wash her hand in water in order to get rid of the sensation. Or she would feel his breath upon her forehead: then she would wash her face in hot water and apply lavender-water to get rid of the horrid sensation.

He would trouble her no more. The man was dead—dead—dead. Yet she could not get him out of her mind. She expected him: against the knowledge of its impossibility, she expected him; she feared to meet him, knowing that on earth no one would ever meet him again. If she was walking upon the Heath in the morning, it would not have surprised her if, all alone, with no one in sight, she had come upon him face to face, stepping down, perhaps, from the gallows tree beside the Heath, where there was always some senseless form smeared with pitch, clanking its chains in the breeze. It would have seemed a trouble only expected if he had suddenly appeared to her while she sat among the gorse and the heath and the wild crab-trees, and had laid his huge clammy black hand upon her shrinking shoulder, crying, 'Mine! mine!' with those hungry eyes and those grinning white teeth.

I say that she was never free from this obsession; it was absurd, because the man, as she repeated over and over again, was hanged—hanged—hanged by the neck till he was dead—dead—dead. He could do her no more harm. Always this horrible creature was present to her in her brain. When she should have slept, he sat at her bedside;

in her dreams she saw the fiery eyes, and they threatened; they said as plainly as if they spoke aloud, 'I shall claim you, some time or other; in the other world you will be mine. I shall claim you. I shall drag you down with me to the place where the souls of wicked negroes are sent. You shall share that horrible place with me. For you are mine. You are mine. Whom God hath joined together no man, not the hangman, not the dissecting surgeon with his knife, can ever put asunder.'

Mrs. Brymer, the only person who knew of her retreat, sometimes came out to see her. She brought her news of her principal creditor.

'The man Fulton,' she said, 'is bad and worthless. He has become a bankrupt, and swears it is your debt, which he multiplies by ten, that hath broken him. He drinks; his shop is closed, his stock is sold for the benefit of his creditors. He would be in prison, but that no one will take the trouble to become his detainer. Let him not trouble you, madam; he can do no harm. What if he does vapour in the tavern? No one heeds what he says; no one believes him. Who regardeth the words of a drunkard?'

'He has a wife and children, you said. Can we help them?'

'Yes; they will get on somehow. Help them? You are all for helping people. Let them help themselves. In this world we must help ourselves, or we become beggars and thieves and I know not what. Pray, madam, do not disturb yourself about this man's wife and children. He went to your lodging in King Street, and pretended that he wanted your plate, intending to sell it—oh, the villain! And now, madam, I hope that the place and the company are to your liking. I saw some very pretty fellows beside

the Wells Tavern. I warrant there are some who find a young widow attractive.'

'Indeed, Mrs. Brymer, I know not. They have not yet asked my opinion.'

'They will—they will. Meantime, no more helping for anybody. Dear madam, you must help yourself.'

Isabel, meantime, was young. At four-and-twenty one cannot be always miserable. One begins to forget even the most disagreeable things: the sun shines; the flowers spring up again; the breath of summer is fragrant; the pulse of youth beats strong; people laugh and talk just as if there were no disagreeable things in the world; then arise new thoughts belonging to the season of youth and spring; new occupations engage the mind.

Thus it was, naturally, with Isabel. Many things happened to turn her mind from the unwholesome contemplation of the past. One little event especially filled her with a great contentment. It was at the Assembly; she was wearing a domino, because that year, in a company so mixed as that of the spa, it was the fashion, when she saw on the other side of the room a gentleman, at sight of whom her cheek flamed, unseen by him or anyone else. He was in the gown and wig of a lawyer; he looked prosperous and cheerful, and he was none other than Mr. Oliver Macnamara. And as he passed two great and serious gentlemen beside her spoke of him:

'I should not be surprised,' said one, 'to hear of that young man's advance. He had a chance yesterday in court, and he was complimented by the Judge. They say that he is eloquent and persuasive, and that he knows law. Happy young man! King's Counsel, Serjeant-at-Law, Judge, Solicitor-General, Lord Chancellor—what a chance he has! What a chance!'

So they passed along, and Isabel, with the happiness of thinking that it was herself who had given that young man his chance, went home to her lonely lodging. Afterwards she was sorry that she had not spoken to her protégé.

So the memory of the courtyard in Newgate became gradually a dim and fading horror in her mind; she was able for the most part to keep a veil over it. The sight of the horrible crowd grew indistinct; the thought of the fetid cell and the mockery of the marriage service recurred less frequently, until she was able to put it from her whenever it arose. Yet her memory was like a portfolio which contains a bundle of pictures which the owner desires to keep concealed and locked up, yet cannot destroy. One need not look at the pictures, but they are there, and from time to time, if only to see that they are not destroyed, the owner must needs open the portfolio and look at them.

CHAPTER V

THE SLEEP OF SNOW

IT was about the end of June that Isabel found herself able to retreat to the village of Hampstead. At that time of year the spa was filled with company; the visitors take such lodgings as they are lucky enough to obtain. Isabel, for her part, lived in a single room of a cottage overlooking the wild Heath. Her living was simple and cheap; she was alone, yet felt no melancholy from solitude. In the morning she drank the waters of the spa; she walked in the gardens; she took her dish of chocolate with the other ladies; or she roamed about the Heath, picking the wild-flowers which here grow abundantly, or listening to the song of the skylark. She was no recluse; she did not conceal her name; she entered willingly into conversation; she sometimes accepted an invitation to a breakfast. In the morning she attended the Assembly, or she sat in the Long Room where the music was played. She sometimes figured in a minuet; she made acquaintance with the better sort, and she charmed the whole company by her gracious manner, her vivacity, and her beauty.

It may very well be supposed—nay, it is only natural—that a woman so young and so beautiful would look upon a second marriage as the most fitting sequel to this

situation. Unfortunately Isabel's position was exposed to many objections and disadvantages. One would imagine that to be the widow of an Honourable and the sister-in-law of a noble Lord would advance a young widow. Perhaps at Tunbridge Wells, or at Bath, such a connection might be useful. But Hampstead Spa is neither Bath nor is it Tunbridge. There are few visitors at Hampstead who can claim any connection with the nobility. Mostly they come from the City. There are the clergy of the City—rank is not for them: rank without wealth would make them contemptible in the eyes of their congregations; rank with wealth would drive them out of the City; besides, who ever heard of a parson, even a London parson, marrying in a noble family?

There are merchants—substantial citizens—who look for fortunes with their wives and give fortunes to their daughters. The time has gone by when great nobles had their houses in the City, and lived among the merchants for half the year; the citizen has learned to look upon rank as something beyond his reach and of no use to him even if he could reach it. There are the tradesmen who regard every title with veneration; a nobleman is to them a superior being not bound by the ordinary moral laws, and believed to be possessed of boundless wealth. Should a mercer of Ludgate Hill, however rich, dare to aspire to the hand of a lady of rank? Such a thing was never known or heard of.

There are, again, the poets and wits, and those—a numerous class—who would fain be considered poets and wits, the beaux and pretty fellows whose fortunes are generally on their backs; the Templars, gallants, captains, and adventurers whom one may meet in the coffee-houses of Covent Garden, the taverns of Fleet Street and Charing

Cross, at the theatre and at all places of public resort, but never at the private houses and assemblies of people of fashion. These gentry, we may be assured, would willingly make love to a young and charming woman, with money. Without money no woman has any charms for them. Now it was speedily discovered, because these things cannot be hidden, that the Honourable Mrs. Weyland was not rich. The discovery put an end at once to the attentions of the adventurers. Had it been known how poor she was, their attentions would probably have been turned into open contempt. The vain and self-important gentlemen called poets and wits are, in fact, as greedy after money as any City merchant. They may declaim against the sordid nature of riches : it is, indeed, a stock subject with them ; yet they grasp eagerly after every guinea ; they sing perpetually of love and beauty, of spring, green fields, babbling brooks, and warbling birds ; they celebrate the wood-nymph and the shepherdess ; but their chosen haunt is the coffee-house, and they have no eyes for the beauty which they praise in their rhymes. They are always looking in the mirror, so to speak, and admiring their own noble faces ; they hear not the song of the skylark for the babble of their own foolish voices, and they are never capable of a generous action because they are always looking for fine phrases with which to exhort others to virtue. Now to a well-constituted mind, the life and the actual deeds of a man are of much greater importance than anything he can find to say on the subject.

Another disadvantage to Isabel was the discovery that although she was the widow of a sprig of Quality, she was not by birth a gentlewoman at all, being nothing but the daughter of a Nonconformist merchant of Galley Quay by Tower Hill ; that her father had a town house beside the

quay, and a country house at Hackney; that he was a wealthy man; and that, having conceived some displeasure with his daughter, he had resolved to cast her off.

Of course, this discovery assumed at once a hundred different shapes. For the sake of charity let us be silent about them. They may be imagined. Some of them left the poor woman no reputation at all; some of them said this, and some that; all were distortions and exaggerations and inventions; all of them were injurious to Isabel's prospects, and kept off many an honest fellow who might otherwise have offered himself and his hand, and the share of a country house.

In a word, if there were some who desired rank, she was but the daughter of a merchant; and if there were some who desired wealth, she had little from her husband, and would perhaps get nothing from her father. So that between two stools this unfortunate lady seemed likely to fall to the ground.

The summer passed away; in the autumn the Spa was closed; the Long Room, the Pump Room, the Card Room were all shut up, the gardens deserted; the company went home; the village of Hampstead was left to the lodging-house-keepers and the laundresses for the winter; there was no longer any fear of footpads upon the hill, or of gipsies upon the Heath. A few gentlefolk who had houses beside the Heath remained and formed a little society for the winter with card-parties once or twice a week. Isabel kept in her lodging for the whole winter; it was lonely, but it was cheap. The snow and cold wind drove her from the Heath; the wind whistled in the leafless branches of Well Walk; and as the winter dragged along her heart fell lower daily, because her purse, with all

her frugality, grew lighter continually, and she knew not what she could do to fill it again.

Perhaps at some future time a way will be opened for women, as well as men, to work for a living. True, no woman ought to work, far less a gentlewoman; it should be the pride and joy of a man to toss the produce of his labours into the lap of a woman. But there may be cases in which there is no man to do this for a woman; there may be women who have neither lover nor husband nor son to work for them; there may be women whose brothers are unable to support them; nay, there may be some who have not even brothers. What are these poor creatures to do? What could such a woman as Isabel Weyland do when all her money was gone? How should she live? how fill that purse again?

One morning Isabel made the disquieting discovery that, of the money which she had brought with her to Hampstead, nothing was left but a few guineas. Only a few guineas between herself and destitution!

What was she to do when the last guinea was gone? The more she thought of this, the more despairing she became, until at last it seemed as if the only thing left to her was the final refuge of the despairing—a voluntary death.

Consider how she was placed.

She had, it is true, a father. He was wealthy; but she had offended him. For five years, though she had on many occasions made attempts to obtain his forgiveness, he had held no communication of any kind with her. She knew him too well to build much upon any hope of reconciliation. He was narrow in his way of thinking; he demanded rigid obedience from his children; he was austere in his rules and conduct; he was hard in his religion,

which was that of a small sect outside of which there could be no salvation; he was accustomed to the deference paid habitually to wealth and authority; he thought that sinners ought to be punished in this world, without prejudice to their eternal punishment in the next; he made no allowance for human weakness, frailty, or passion.

Then, again, she had a brother. But he was as austere, as rigid, as inflexible as her father, and as many other members of their little conventicle.

And she had a brother-in-law. He was a ruined profligate, living for the most part in a poor way, unworthy of his exalted rank, in a corner of the great empty house which was his own for life only.

She had also the name of her late husband. She had run away with the man who loved her; for his sake she had left father and brother and family and friends. It was such a marriage as that spoken of by our Lord Himself, where two become one. But the father saw in his son-in-law a needy profligate (whereas he was a sober, learned, and pious gentleman, most unlike his brother the gambling lord), and would not forgive his daughter for marrying such an one, belonging as well to the class whom he regarded as accountable for all the miseries of the nation and the people.

There were also the new friends, those to whom her husband had introduced her. Alas! there are many camps in this realm of England, and they do not readily overlap or mix with each other. The camp to which Ronald Weyland belonged was the camp of the nobility; that to which Isabel belonged was the camp of Nonconformity: in the former there is neither buying nor selling; in the latter they all buy and sell. The camp of nobility received Isabel politely, but coldly: she was welcome to

lose her money at their card-tables; but she was never made one of themselves, never in their intimacy; she was the daughter of a cit, and they were of the nobility.

It was impossible, therefore, to think of appealing to them for pity or for assistance. In society, as in business, there is no friendship, and there is no compassion. One must pay or go out; the door is always open to those who go out; but to appeals for help, and for pity, and for friendliness, the door is always shut; no voices of lamentation or of distress reach the Assembly or the Card Room, the Masquerade or the Rout.

Consider, further, what such a woman in such a position could do for herself. She had learned no art, no craft, and no accomplishment; she had been brought up, like all people of her class, to regard the woman who works for a living as a creature beneath herself. There is but one resource left to her. She must marry. Failing that chance, what was left to her? She might—she must—make a personal appeal to her father. He could not refuse her the bare means of subsistence. She would go to him as the prodigal son (who had himself spent his last guinea), and would humble herself. Perhaps he would relent. If not, she might perhaps, she thought (but, then, she knew not the pangs of starvation), set herself to starve upon her father's doorsteps.

She wrote, therefore, a letter to her father, in which she humbled herself.

‘I am punished,’ she said. ‘I am willing to acknowledge that I am justly punished for my sin of disobedience—for marrying against your wishes, and for marrying into a society to which I was not born. My lamented husband was not, indeed, the unbeliever and the prodigal which you believed him to be. On the contrary, he was a sober-

minded Christian, albeit a member of the Established Church ; he was a scholar ; he lived a moral and a godly life. Yet he was not your choice, but mine own. I have already told you that he is dead ; he left me with a slender fortune, of which scarcely anything now remains. I live in a humble cottage, in a single room, at the village of Hampstead, at this time of year a lonely and solitary abode, where I can meditate upon the past and look forward to the future.

‘ Sir, I am now reduced almost to my last penny ; to be literal, I have but a few guineas to save me from destitution. Is it too much to ask that you will grant me such an allowance, however small, as may enable me to live in the most humble manner becoming to your daughter ? There is no submission or acknowledgment that I am not willing to make in order to win your favour once more. But apart from that favour, if you do not extend to me a certain measure of help, I know not what will become of me, whither I may turn, what steps I may be forced to take.’

More she added, but all in the same strain.

The letter written, she despatched it by hand to Hackney by her landlady’s son : it was not a great journey, not more than seven or eight miles.

The lad was gone all day. In the evening he returned. It was then five o’clock and already dark, and the following was the answer which the unfortunate Isabel had to read by the light of her single tallow candle.

‘ SISTER ’ (so it was her brother, then, who had received the letter),—‘ I have been so fortunate as to intercept your messenger with the letter, by which you sought to disturb the calm which should surround the aged Christian’s ways and footsteps. I answer it for my father and in his name.

It is written, "Be ye not yoked with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with iniquity?" Also that we are not to keep "company with any man that is an idolater or a reviler." And again, "Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." In the First Epistle to Timothy Paul plainly sets out the duty of widows, especially of younger widows, in a passage which I commend to your attention.

'Sister, she who makes her bed must lie upon it. You have left your own people and have cast in your lot with the ungodly. You cannot blame your father. Therefore, if he leave you to your own devices, how can you blame me if I follow your father's example, and refuse to acknowledge you any more as sister of mine?

'There are a few trifles of yours still in the house. Heaven forbid that I should seek to deprive you of your own. Half a dozen samplers, a book of pious meditations, a roll of flannel, a horn-book, a child's doll, are certainly your own. These things shall be delivered to any messenger whom you may send for them. Should there be anything else of yours, that also shall be sent. So, with such prayers as we offer for the welfare of the stranger without the gates,

'I am,

'Yours to command,

'ONCE YOUR BROTHER.'

Isabel read this cruel and unfeeling letter with despair. Nothing, therefore, was left to her; nothing—she shuddered and trembled—but a horrid choice: she might wander forth penniless in the cold and the snow, or she might somehow put an end to her existence. How can a woman kill herself? By poison? What poison? Where was she to get

poison? What shop would sell her poison? What was she to ask for? There were no shops at Hampstead in the winter. Then—by means of a knife. That meant dreadful pain and a resolution to inflict it upon herself; and a mess of blood—the sight of blood always made her faint. By hanging—where was she to hang herself? From a branch of a tree on the Heath? And where would she find the rope? And it must be dreadfully cold swinging in the air with the sleet driving about one's unprotected head.

Death in any manner was better than wandering penniless about the roads outside London. But none of those ways seemed possible. Then she remembered how her husband one evening read aloud to her from some book of travels, which spoke of death by sleep in the snow as the most painless way of any. 'The victim,' said the book, 'growing at last tired of walking and running, when he has lost his way, sits down to wait for the morning. He instantly falls fast asleep, the snow falls upon him and covers him up, the icy wind penetrates to his heart and freezes the blood so that it stands still. In the morning, when the day breaks, there is nothing to be seen, not even a mound upon the level surface of the beautiful snow. The winter passes: when the spring comes and the snows melt, the body of the man is found, the face calm and peaceful as of one who sleeps at peace.' All this Isabel remembered, and more. The book went on to tell of a whole regiment which in Russia, or perhaps Lapland, sat down one night beside a stream waiting till morning. When morning came the light of the east fell upon a bank of snow. In the month of April the snow melted, and the regiment was discovered, the men sitting in long lines, their muskets beside them, and every man sleeping like a child—but it was the sleep of death.

‘To-morrow,’ said Isabel, ‘I will go out upon the Heath. I will find the deepest snowdrift. I will sit down in it; the north wind shall blow upon my face, and I will fall asleep—to wake no more.’ She wept over her own sad fate; she knelt and offered up a prayer for forgiveness; she burned her brother’s letter; she took out her purse and counted the contents: there were in it about six or seven guineas. ‘My interment,’ she said, ‘will be humble; my grave will be in the churchyard among the graves of the poor laundresses of the village; it will cost no more than two or three guineas; the rest, with all that I have—it is not much—in clothes—shall go to my landlady. One night more in a warm bed, beside a crackling fire, and then—the icy wind, the shivering limbs, the sleep—the dreamless sleep—and the grave in the cold clay which nothing warms; and the waking to the next world—the world of the suicide. Lord! Lord! Thou knowest—forgive, forgive!’

She cried again over the pity of it—the sadness and the pity of it. Then, for the last time, as she thought, she undressed and went to bed, and as a condemned criminal in his last night always sleeps peacefully and sweetly, so the woman who had resolved to die on the morrow fell asleep, and was cheered with the most delightful dreams of happiness and love and pleasant gardens, till she awoke and found it broad daylight—the morning already advanced to nine o’clock, and the winter sun lying on the broken expanse of shining snow set everywhere with sparkling diamonds.

The brightness of the sunshine and the light almost reconciled Isabel to life. But yet . . . when that purse was empty what should she do? The sleep of the snow still seemed the best way out of all her difficulties. Now see

how things sometimes happen when Fortune seems to wear a most threatening face ; how when help is most wanted, sometimes help arrives.

For about eleven o'clock she received a visit ; it was from a certain attorney whom she had known in her childhood ; he was her father's attorney, a prim and smug man in black cloth, always on very good terms with himself ; one of the small sect which met in her father's conventicle, to whom religion meant that he was one of the very limited number of the Elect ; yet one to whom good works appeared to be an outward and visible illustration of the True Faith, so that the believer could not choose but be upright in all his doings, while it was true that persons of other faiths might also be virtuous, a point which he would charitably allow. He had been accustomed to visit at Hackney either on business or by invitation. After dinner the conversation turned habitually upon points of doctrine, when Isabel would make haste to escape.

'Sir!' Isabel sprang to her feet as this gentleman stood at the open door. 'You have come to tell me something!' Indeed, there was that look in the attorney's face which showed that he had a communication to make—a look of importance ; a look of curiosity ; a look, perhaps, of satisfaction, because his communication was of a nature which brought with it certain solid consolations.

'Madam,' he said, 'I am the bearer of news which is to begin with a sad bereavement. Sad, indeed, because your father is dead.'

'My father is—dead! My father is dead?' For this was a thing she had not expected. It seems, indeed, to many children, that their fathers will never die, so much accustomed are they to the contemplation of an old age

which begins at fifty and drags along to threescore years and ten.

‘He is dead, madam. That, alas! is most true.’

‘Oh, sir, it is impossible. That he should die, without forgiving or bestowing his blessing upon me.’

‘He is dead, madam,’ the attorney repeated. ‘He died last night. Yet, as regards his forgiveness and his blessing, I think you will find that you have received them both. He is dead. He died last night, having been ill but a few hours. Your brother would have sent word to you——’

‘Oh! my brother!—my brother! Sir, I know my brother’s excellent intentions, I assure you.’

‘He would have sent to you, I say, but he knew not your present lodging. Your father died after a fit of apoplexy. It is the disease most common among City merchants. He will be buried in Bunhill Fields among his own people the day after to-morrow.’

‘My father dead! Oh, what can I say? What can I do?’

She wrung her hands for herself, while the filial tears fell for her father.

The attorney did not understand her trouble.

‘Madam,’ he said, ‘to lose a parent is an affliction which must fall upon all of us, sooner or later, if we survive that parent. For a parent to lose a son is perhaps worse still. It is now only two short years since I buried my own great-aunt. But you may take comfort when I inform you that in spite of your father’s disapproval of your marriage—“Be ye not,” he would say, speaking of that event, “yoked with unbelievers” (it was a melancholy event for him)—he made no change in his testamentary disposition. You left him and the serious Con-

nexion in order to marry a mere butterfly of fashion. He thought that you followed your heart rather than the dictates of religion, and it weighed upon his mind. For he would have preferred the safety of your soul. Yet he made no alteration in his will.'

'He made no alteration—no alteration in his will? Dear sir, pray explain how the fact affects my position.'

'It affects you, madam, to this extent, that your father, while he bequeathed to your brother, his only son, the business on Galley Quay, with all the future emoluments and profits therefrom—a great and noble bequest—divided the rest of his property, including his real and personal estate, his houses and lands, his money, his plate, his furniture, his horses and carriages, into two parts, equal in all respect. One moiety he hath bestowed upon your brother in addition to the business on the Quay; the other upon yourself.'

'On myself? Why, truly it would seem, therefore, as if my father relented at the last. But pray, sir, what may this moiety mean? Is it a sufficiency?'

'A sufficiency! Indeed, madam, I know not what you have from your late husband; but he was, I have understood, though a sprig of Quality, a younger son.'

Isabel inclined her head, partly to hide a smile. Could she tell this man of the City, where there is contempt for poverty, that she was come to her last guinea?

'Madam, I do not know, I say, the extent of your late husband's estate. I may, however, inform you that even in the City your father was respected for his wealth as well as his integrity. Your moiety, madam, cannot be less than £80,000, which at 6 per cent. is £4,800 a year. It may possibly amount, should the lands and houses realize as much as I believe them to be worth, to over £100,000.

Isabel breathed a deep sigh of relief.

‘Sir, I thank you for bringing me the news.’

He left her begging to be allowed the management of her affairs as he had had that of her father’s.

Isabel took out her purse again and shook it. The guineas jangled at the bottom of it, the six or seven guineas—the six or seven last.

‘Oh,’ she laughed, ‘and he does not know how near I was to destitution. My poor father! he is dead. But in blessing me with this fortune he was blessed himself as one who could forgive.’ Then another thought struck her. She coloured crimson, she gasped. ‘Oh, heavens!’ she said, ‘if it had happened only two months ago! What things I should have escaped!’ And again she turned pale. She fell upon her knees again; she clasped her hands; the tears rolled down her cheeks. She remembered the painless death, the sleep of snow. ‘O Lord!’ she cried, ‘O Lord of mercy, what things I have escaped!’

CHAPTER VI

BY CHANCE

AMONG those who were wont to repair to St. James's Park for the coolness during the summer evenings of the year of grace 1752, two years after a certain day made memorable by the scenes we have witnessed in the King's Bench Prison and in Newgate, was the Honourable Isabel, widow of the late Ronald Weyland, sometime Commissioner in the Hanaper Office, and only brother of the Earl of Stratherrick. Mrs. Weyland, still quite a young woman, not yet past six-and-twenty, and in the fulness of the beauty and the charms which many men find more attractive than the ignorant artlessness of the maiden of eighteen or twenty, now occupied a very fine house in St. James's Square, where she lived in the style and the substantial comfort of a lady of wealth considerable and most rare for a young widow, keeping up a great establishment of servants, with butler, hall-porter, lacqueys, coachmen, chairmen, lady's-maid, sewing and stillroom maids, housekeeper and ordinary women. On the evening of which we speak, which was in early July, and between seven and eight in the evening, she was escorted in the Park by her brother-in-law.

The noble lord was a tall and well-proportioned man, not more than thirty or thereabouts. He was dressed, as became his position and his rank, in a very fine coat of

blue silk, with a white velvet waistcoat ; his star was on his breast ; he carried a gold-headed clouded cane ; his snuff-box was of gold ; his buckles were of gold ; the lace of his ruffles and his necktie was of the finest Valenciennes ; his stockings were white silk ; he presented to the view of the world at large—that part of it which knew not the truth—the outward appearance of a man of wealth as well as rank. Who was to know, unless he had been told—but then the whole town of fashion had been told, and knew very well—that this nobleman, so proud in his bearing, so splendid in his appearance, was nothing better than a pauper, maintained by his sister-in-law ? Isabel, in fact, made him a small monthly allowance, sufficient for his bare necessities, but not sufficient for the insatiable maw of a gambler ; it was, indeed, coupled with a condition, which his pride readily accepted, that whatever he might do with the allowance—whether he chose to throw it away at the gaming table or in any other folly—he would not part with any of the things which announced his rank—neither his gold-hilted sword, nor his star, nor his gold buttons and buckles, nor the gold snuff-box, nor the gold-headed cane, nor the fine lace at his neck and his wrist. If Isabel consented to maintain this impoverished lord, her brother-in-law, she resolved to have at least some return for the money so expended in his appearance, which continued to be that of a man of wealth, so that his companionship should not disgrace her dignity and position.

Many men lose their money by various forms of gambling ; it is one method—and that the most common—of creating vicissitudes in a family. Down goes the gambler ; up rises the merchant and takes his place. There are those who frequent the hazard-table and those who stake their fortunes upon faro ; there are those who attend races

and run horses against each other ; there are those who spend their whole lives in betting—surely the most foolish of all the roads to ruin ; there are those who lay their money and back their opinions upon the skill of prize-fighters, players of quarterstaff, wrestlers, and professors of fence ; there are also those who frequent the cockpit, and throw away whole fortunes on the (supposed) superior courage and tenacity of favourite birds ; there are others, again, who practise with avidity and blind judgment every possible form of testing chance or luck—and one of these was Isabel's brother-in-law, the Earl of Stratherrick. He was not a rich man to begin with ; at this time he had lost, in various methods of gambling, but perhaps chiefly in his favourite resort, the cockpit, the whole of his inherited fortune, including the contents of the family mansion in the country—a house which his ancestors had been filling for four hundred years with plate, pictures, books, furniture, armour, arms, and all the things which make the solid enjoyment of a long and noble line of ancestry. The lands he had alienated for his life ; the house belonged with the title and the lands to his cousin, the heir ; the woods he had cut down and sold. He still frequented the cockpit whenever he found himself in the possession of a guinea or two ; but it was not the place at Westminster, where his equals in rank laid their bets and won and lost large sums. He was now seen at the Gray's Inn Cockpit, haunted by young City merchants, by lawyers, by highwaymen, by farmers, drovers, butchers, draymen, and a mere mixture, mostly of the baser sort, where he could lay or take the odds in shillings and half-crowns, wrangling with the noisy mob, and so carry on his favourite pursuit, though in a miserably small and mean way.

Lord Stratherrick carried himself bravely, and looked about him with the insolent air of contempt for the rest of the world which especially distinguishes the British aristocracy of his generation, and makes them justly the pride of their fellow-countrymen. It is, however, wonderful to observe how meekly the people receive this insolence. It would seem as if, for their part, they take a pleasure in being thus trampled upon. The haughtiness of rank is, perhaps, naturally expected of a nobleman. What is the good of rank if it does not confer the air of superiority? In the same way, respect for rank is part of the duty of a private person who upholds King, Church, Lords, and Commons. His lordship, whose appearance was otherwise distinguished, presented an habitual air of discontent, coupled with that of contempt for his company. He could no longer be where he wished to be, with his equals, seated round the hazard-table, crying the main, or on the lowest bench of the cockpit. His sister-in-law was the most obstinate, disobliging person in the whole world. She refused to pay any of his sporting debts for him; she refused to advance his allowance by so much as a single day; she refused to increase his allowance; she showed herself, in fact, as he frequently lamented to his ex-valet, Mr. Pinder, of the Grapes Tavern, Jermyn Street, no better than one would expect of the daughter of a mere City merchant. These misfortunes, no doubt, had the effect of permanently thrusting out his lower lip, a disfigurement which gave him a peevish and even a suspicious look. He was, indeed, suspicious of everyone who approached his sister-in-law. He endeavoured to play the part of Cerberus, the watch-dog, jealously keeping off, with his three-headed barking and his white teeth, all those who came after the Golden Fleece. Isabel represented that

valuable skin ; she was now by far the greatest prize in the marriage market. Whenever she appeared in the Park, at the May, at the Assembly, at the Gardens, the whisper ran around that the lady had six, ten, twenty thousand pounds a year ; everywhere she had a small crowd of suitors buzzing around her—a crowd which his lordship could not keep altogether from her save at the cost of insulting and fighting them one by one ; for who would not be pushing, who would not be persistent, who would not dare to fight, with so rich, so charming a woman as the prize of daring ? She went to Bath—the roads were black with those who followed ; to Tunbridge Wells—the lodgings of the spa were filled with those who thought to find a chance ; she returned to London—they all came too. Penelope herself had not a greater following. They were mostly hungry suitors ; no penniless adventurer that came to town but hoped for presentation to this young widow—no younger son but was ready to offer himself as a pretender to her hand, with his noble connections. Many of the elder sons—despite her connection with the City merchant of Hackney, Nonconformist, and not even a gentleman and an armiger—would have been rejoiced at taking her hand and her fortune. A woman, indeed, who has an income of thousands a year, all placed out in lands and houses of the City, is indeed rare. They all offered themselves one after the other, as chance gave them an opening—some of them after a day's acquaintance, some after a month ; some there were who tried to carry the fortress by assault, some who endeavoured to undermine its walls ; some (but those were of the baser sort) endeavoured to compromise the widow and to create scandal or scandalous rumours which would connect the lady and the adventurer—but so far without

success. Some of the wooers came crying, some came singing, some came laughing, some came sighing ; never did a woman receive so many offers in manner so different, yet in the end so similar. She knew, by experience, the candidate at first sight. She laughed to watch his clumsy manœuvres ; she foretold the next move ; she knew when to expect the next offer, and she knew the form it would take.

She had a great many friends. A woman so rich is quite certain to have a great many friends. They loved her as fondly as women always love another who is richer, younger, more charming, than themselves ; they whispered things about her, but with sadness and sorrow, as those who whisper scandals are generally wont to do. She had been seen—no one would believe it, but it was told on excellent authority—with one gallant on the banks of Rosamund's Pond by midnight ; and with another—if such a thing were possible—beside the fountain in St. James's Square at midnight ; some of them remembered how, in the early days of her widowhood, she had been constantly seen at the card-table. This proof of weakness and of folly went far to reduce the rich widow to their own level, which was a great consolation to the envious and the poorer sort ; they all knew and were ready to acknowledge that it was through no fault of her own—because we do not choose our parents—that she was nothing better by birth than the daughter of a mere cit, from whom she inherited most of her money ; the paternal fortune, it was reported, was made in a dirty warehouse beside the river, out of figs and raisins. This statement, however, was contradicted ; there was another school which made it tallow, and still another which made it candles, but they knew nothing for certain. However, it

was now quite certain that the lady gambled no more ; she had frequent card-parties in her own house, but she herself did not sit down to play except for trifling sums ; she freely and liberally invited her friends to festivities of all kinds—assemblies, masquerades, and water-parties ; she was most generous and compassionate, as the Rector of St. James's Church very well knew, to the poor of the parish, and to all those who wanted help in the hour of adversity and distress ; she was good-natured and kindly to the humble ; she took no part in the scandalous talk which makes up most of the discourse of fine ladies ; and, whether as regards her dress, which was always costly, or her manner—which was always gracious to the deserving, but could be cold and proud to the presuming—or her suite and establishment, she was a great lady. There was, as we have seen, a certain brief period when Isabel had looked upon a second marriage as a possible means of livelihood. During that time she had been perhaps willing—forced by necessity into consent—to contract some marriage which she would afterwards, when she became rich, have regretted with bitterness. She was preserved, however, as we have also seen, from this misfortune by what she could only regard as a Providential interference. The immediate and natural effect of her escape was a distaste to any second marriage at all. Her purpose now, as she was rich and independent, was to preserve her complete independence ; no legal skill in drawing up marriage settlements, she perceived, would secure for her the complete independence which she now enjoyed ; and the more she considered and contemplated the regiments of men who flocked around her, the more she despised their empty and wasted lives, and the stronger her resolution became to guard herself against

dependence on and subjection to any of them. For these reasons, and not out of any respect for her brother-in-law, she endured his company and tolerated his jealousy.

At the entrance to the Park, by Spring Gardens, the footmen stood about in groups, exchanging scandals and inventing anecdotes concerning their mistresses. They had to wait till the latter should come out, and so, after their kind, they beguiled the time as best they could by the repetition of old lies and the fabrication of new. Could the astonished world listen to these gentry, and believe what they say—but their discourse is happily forgotten as soon as uttered—we should all of us be lamenting the deplorable fact that in this year of grace there is no kind of honour left among the men, nor virtue among the women; that both men and women cheat habitually at cards; that the men get drunk every night, insult each other and are afraid to fight; that the women cannot pay for their finery; and that posts of emolument in His Majesty's service are openly sold by men of rank and honour.

Many other pleasant things spoken of as generally true are fully discussed by the gentlemen of the worsted epaulette, whose safety lies in their obscurity; so that, as I said above, it is a happiness for the credit and character of the time that they have been forgotten.

The evening grew later: the sun had set: but it was still quite light as Isabel approached the gates on her way out. The following of beaux had now gradually left her. There was no one left with her but her brother-in-law. At the gates Isabel turned to him. 'Good-night,' she said. 'I see my two rascals. Now, my lord, let me advise you. Go home. Tempt not fortune.'

His lordship bowed low and turned away, but the lip went out another half-inch or so, and it was with a more



SHE WAS MET BY A YOUNG LAWYER.

peevish look than before that he walked away alone. Isabel looked after him for a moment. His discontent was not new to her, any more than his passion for one form of sport. She knew that his thoughts every evening, if not his presence, were at the cockpit; he had not yet, in imagination, pledged his last acre, or sold his last coppice, or lost his last guinea. And, like all other gamesters, if his life had to be acted all over again, he would return to the same place and listen to the same music of the birds and their backers. Isabel looked after him; but the time when she might have sighed over the waste of a life was gone; she only wondered if his money for the month was as yet all spent or lost, and if she would have to endure his company, which was cold and aristocratic, for dinner until the next allowance became due.

Just as she passed through the gates she was met by a young lawyer. He was alone; he was about to take the evening air in the Park, after a long day's work in a hot and stifling court, surrounded by rapacious suitors and reluctant witnesses, with a point of law to enforce upon a deaf old judge and a difficult jury. He was a tall and handsome man; the face sharp and thin, his eyes bright, his features regular. Beneath his lawyer's wig he carried his head erect with something of the air noble; his gown, as yet only of stuff, swelled out behind him in the breeze like the sail of a gallant ship; he walked with the easy assurance which one commonly finds in lawyers. There is reason for that assurance: they are always before the world, on their feet, playing their part openly in the eyes of all, addressing judges and juries; examining, confusing, and convicting of perjury, or of muddle-headedness, the most positive witnesses; advancing objections and assuming a confidence which they are sometimes far from

feeling, in the justice of their cause and the equity of their clients' claims.

Suddenly this young lawyer, who had been sauntering leisurely past the King's Mews into Spring Gardens, looking about him without curiosity, for the fashionable world had no interest for him, stopped; he started. The face of Isabel at the Park gates struck him; he hesitated; he changed colour; he showed every sign of surprise, of confusion, of doubt. What should he do? Could he venture to address this lady? Or would it be better to pretend not to recognise her, to pass her as a stranger?

For the sight of this lady recalled a passage in his life which was painful and shameful for him to remember, and for the lady would be assuredly quite as painful, and perhaps quite as shameful. We know what that passage was. Now, after two years, he met face to face the woman to whom he owed life, liberty, fortune—everything.

Should he venture to speak to her? Would she pretend not to know him, not even, perhaps, to acknowledge that she had ever seen so much as the outside of the prison?

This hesitation lasted a few moments only; but in so brief a time one may get through a large quantity of reasoning. Then he hesitated no longer. He advanced and stood before her, bowing low. But all the assurance was gone out of his face: he blushed like any girl; he stammered and boggled, just as if he was not a lawyer.

'Madam——' he began. The lady stopped, wondering. Then she looked round, and saw her footmen waiting. 'I entreat your pardon, madam, in advance—I am most presumptuous. Surely, however, madam, if I recall a day, two years ago and more—a day which I ought to forget, but associated with the most noble, the most generous,

the most unexpected . . . madam, what can I say? Can it be possible that I am wrong? Yet the day is burned into my heart, and cannot be forgotten. How could I ever forget the face—the kindness—the pity—even though the conversation lasted no more than a few minutes, and though I saw that face but once—for a moment—how could I forget that face?

Isabel stared at him; slowly the remembrance of the man came back to her. In this prosperous, handsome, well-dressed gentleman she saw the once ragged wretch upon whose release, in a fit of generosity, she had expended nearly all she had in the world.

‘Madam,’ he repeated, watching her change of colour and her troubled eyes, ‘you cannot but remember—forgive me for reminding you of my existence.’

She raised her fan to her face to hide the agitation into which this recognition had thrown her. He waited humbly, saying no more.

She lowered her fan. Her eyes were hard; the tear of pity was no more in them, making them soft.

‘You are Mr. Oliver Macnamara,’ she said. ‘You see that I remember both your face and your name. Would you have me forget them?’

‘I would not, madam, indeed,’ he replied, with a touch of the Irish way of speech.

‘Then, sir, is there anything I——’

‘Nothing, madam, believe me.’

‘Sir, you recall a memory which is both hateful and shameful.’

‘To me it is most humiliating; still, it remains the memory of a day most fortunate. There are humiliations which one must not forget. They may be stepping-stones——’

‘Perhaps, sir, since you have said so much, you have said enough. You have met me by accident. Let us part.’

‘You have done so many charitable and generous things since then that you can afford to forget them. Madam, I respect your wish. Henceforth, when I meet you, I will make no sign that I have ever before so much as spoken with you. I am always your most humble and most faithful servant, believe me; I will do exactly what you wish and please.’

‘Very well, then, Mr. Macnamara—we part as we met. Stop, sir! You look prosperous. May I ask if you have succeeded in your profession since you returned to it?’

‘Thanks to you, madam, I was enabled to return to it. Fortune has smiled upon me. When I am Judge, or Attorney-General, or Lord Chancellor himself, I shall say, “This you owe to the lady who relieved you from starvation and drew you gently out of the pit.” Believe, madam, even if we never meet again, that there is one heart which always beats in gratitude for you—one servant whom you can always command.’

The man’s earnestness inspired confidence. Face, voice, eyes, words—all could be trusted.

‘Sir,’ she said, ‘if you would know more about me, come with me to my house. It is but a little way. My footmen are waiting for me.’

Oliver Macnamara bowed with humility and took his place beside her. They walked away. Two varlets in a green and gold livery, bearing long sticks with round balls at the end, walked after them.

‘My house,’ she said, ‘is in St. James’s Square. There are in the lives of most persons, I believe, some things

which are best forgotten. Let us forget "the certain things."

'Madam, all shall be buried in silence—not forgotten.'

'If you wish to nourish this emotion of gratitude—it is rare—let me not stand in the way. But before the rest of the world it must be concealed. We are acquaintances only.'

'Acquaintances, madam, only,' he echoed.

'Then, this is my house; Mr. Macnamara, I am rejoiced to welcome you within my doors. It is, as you say, a long time since we met. Will you come in with me?'

The houses in St. James's Square are large, roomy, and solid. Isabel's was on the east side, her windows facing the west and the sunset, and looking down upon the garden of the square, with its fountain in the middle, its grass lawns, and its beds of flowers. In the hall two more footmen stood up to receive their mistress.

Isabel led the way upstairs to the drawing-room. It was lit up in readiness for her return, with wax candles in candelabra hanging from the ceiling and in silver sconces against the wall. The room was large and lofty; it was filled with fine furniture, pictures, vases, mirrors and chairs, with a profusion of gilt after the fashion of the day. One of the men stood at the door waiting for orders.

'This evening,' said Isabel, 'I am not at home to anyone. Mr. Macnamara, you will, I am sure, take a little supper with me.'

When the door was closed, the young man fell upon his knees and took her hand.

'My benefactress!' he murmured.

'Mr. Macnamara, remember what I said. Once for all, I rejoice that you have justified your words of ambition. So, if you please, not one word more.'

He kissed her hand and rose.

‘My name,’ Isabel continued, ‘is Weyland—Isabel, widow of the late Honourable Ronald Weyland, one of His Majesty’s Commissioners for the Hanaper Office. Now you know who I am. For the rest, I am wealthy, as women go ; and I live here, in my own house.’

They took their supper of cold chicken and a bottle of wine together. They talked after supper, sitting at the open window, while the waters of the fountain plashed pleasantly in their ears, and the fragrance of the summer flowers was wafted up to the windows. A pleasant talk between a sympathetic woman and an ambitious man. It was nearly twelve when her guest rose to take his leave.

‘I am *very* glad we met, Mr. Macnamara. Come to see me again. Come often. Tell me more of your work at the Bar and your success in court. I must go to hear you plead. I have nothing to do except to look on. My life is perfectly dull and perfectly quiet ; one day is like another ; I envy you men who have ambition more than I can tell you. I am but a fluttering butterfly, and about as useful in the world.’

Isabel went into her own room reflecting on many things.

‘He will come again,’ she thought. ‘He was pleased to meet me ; he was pleased with the house. He is sure to come again. A man likes the sympathy of a woman to whom he can tell things.’ As a widow she understood the desire of a man for sympathy—that is to say, for someone to whom he can confide the whole of his troubles and ambitions and successes. Her own husband, Isabel remembered, had counted upon her sympathies in the same way, without expecting or asking for any corre-

sponding return. In fact, he never offered her any sympathy of any kind. 'They call it love,' she thought. 'But this man is not of my world ; he will not make love. It will be pleasant to receive a man from whom there will be no word of love. We shall conceal the past, and we shall forget it. But it will remain as an invisible bond between us.'

The clock struck one. Isabel fell asleep. Had she possessed the spirit of prophecy, she would have remembered that there were several things in the past which she desired to conceal, and that this was the first that had happened and the least disagreeable. The worse, and even the very worst, were still to follow.

CHAPTER VII

AFTER THE MORNING SERVICE

HE did come again. Of course he came again. Was it possible for him—an Irishman and a young man, susceptible, like all of his country and his age, to the attractions of beauty—to refuse the invitation of a charming woman? Of course he came again. Beauty drew him, together with the pleasure of finding himself once more, after a long time, in the company of a woman who would talk to him about himself; the attraction of a great house, with all the refinements which belong to it; the presence of wealth assured; of ease without effort; of enjoyment without working for it; and, with all, the participation of a secret. Wherever there is a secret between two people there is a bond of union which cannot be broken; perhaps they do not talk about it—why should they?—yet they move round it, the thing is always in their minds, at one moment drawing them together, and the next moment driving them apart. In the desert of the Lawyers' Temple, which is a very Sahara, dry and arid, void of every green thing, the thought of this woman rose up before Oliver Macnamara as refreshing as the plash of a fountain or the babble of a brook to the weary traveller. He knew no other house—not any other house in the whole area covered by the Bills of Mortality—where

he would be welcomed as a visitor and invited as a friend.

Many young lawyers there are of whom the same thing may be said. They come up from the country; they are young gentlemen from Ireland or from Scotland; some of them may even arrive at good practice, while they still remain, as they came, strangers to any kind of society. The world of fashion knows nothing, and refuses to know anything, of those who earn their living by work of any kind; the rigid, and perhaps wholesome, rule of the Bar prohibits social intercourse with the attorneys, proctors, notaries, conveyancers, who bring cases, briefs, and retaining fees to barristers; as professional men, again, and not traders, they have no intercourse or community of interests with the freemen and merchants of the City. Again, the English Bar is largely hereditary; the son follows the father; a kind of caste has been created in Chancery Lane and about the four great Inns of Court; this caste does not welcome new-comers, and especially looks coldly upon new-comers from Ireland and Scotland, who have to get on by their abilities alone. Hence, for these friendless young lawyers, the tavern, the pit of the theatre, and the coffee-house, where men meet daily and no women are to be seen, are the only places of resort; and while their wits are sharpened by a perpetual conflict of tongues, their manners, for want of the society of women, truth to say, too often suffer detriment and become somewhat rusty, rude, and rough. The invitation of Mrs. Weyland, therefore, offered nothing less than the opening of the gates of the social world to this lawyer. What young Irishman ever failed to take advantage of such an opening, or hesitated to transfer his powers of conversation and amusement from the tavern to the service of a *grande dame*?

Therefore Oliver did come again. On the Sunday morning after the service at St. James's, Piccadilly, Isabel when she came out found him waiting for her in the south porch. She was not thinking of him or expecting him; but the quick flush that mounted to her cheek, the smile of unaffected welcome, the ready and friendly hand, showed the pleasure with which she received this attention. Why not? Do not all women, even those who receive most attention, like more attention still?

'Mr. Macnamara!' she cried, 'I did not expect to see you here to-day. Do you attend this service often?'

'My own parish church,' he replied, 'is in the Temple.'

'Then you came, I suppose, to hear our Rector. He is accounted, truly, a great scholar and a fine preacher.'

'Nay, madam, I have no doubt that he is what you say. But I came here because it is your parish church, and in the hopes that I might be so fortunate as to find you here, and so be permitted, perhaps, to escort you on your way home.'

'It is very kindly meant of you, sir. I will dismiss my man, and we will walk home together.'

So they came out with the stream of worshippers into Jermyn Street.

'The day is fine and the air is warm, madam,' said Oliver. 'Shall we perhaps—if it would not fatigue you—walk a little in the Park?'

He was certainly a very proper and comely young man; tall and broad, with a frame of great strength; his fine and clear-cut face, with its firm mouth, its regular outline, like unto that of the ancient Apollo—God of the Sun, its keen eyes, its expression of resolution, and its ready smile, caused all the world—especially all the women—to turn and look at him; his white silk stockings, gold

buckles, black velvet waistcoat, lace ruffles, starched bands, and lawyer's wig, with his gown hanging nearly to the ground, proclaimed him not only as a lawyer, but also a lawyer in good practice and prosperity.

'Let us by all means walk in the Park,' said Isabel. 'But not in St. James's Park, where the crowd on Sundays is so great that one cannot talk.'

She led the way into the Green Park, where every day all the week through the young soldiers are taught drill and exercise and to carry themselves like ramrods under the care of the sergeants, but on Sundays there is a mere solitude beside its ponds and under its trees and by the meandering little stream which trickles through its midst. It is then a place beloved by amorous couples, who wander over its lawns and beneath its avenues, murmuring words which, if they were heard, would prove how powerless is language, save with a poet, to express the true emotions of the heart. Corydon courts Amaryllis in commonplace, and conveys what he cannot utter for want of words—his true emotions—by the pressure of his arm about her waist.

'I am so much out of the fashion,' said Isabel, 'that I now keep my Sundays wholly free from the noise and glitter of the rout and the card-room. There was a time, I confess'—she sighed over the confession—'when the hazard-table dragged me to its side on Sunday evenings, as well as every evening in the week. In those days, with the rest of the world, I tempted Fortune.'

'The Fortune of cards betrays,' said Oliver, moralizing, 'all those who woo her to their own destruction. 'Tis a deceitful goddess and malignant to the human species. Do not confuse her, however, with the Fortune which is otherwise called Providence.'

'She betrayed me, I remember,' said Isabel with a smile.

‘She certainly betrayed me, because she took away all my money and left me head over ears in debt.’

Oliver made as if he understood nothing of this confession.

‘Her name should be Circe, since she corrupts and disfigures all; or she should be called Parthenope, one of the Sirens, who lured unhappy sailors—that is, unhappy mortals—to their ruin.’

Isabel laughed.

‘This is the kind of serious talk which shows that we have just come out of church. It befits the Sunday. But you, Mr. Macnamara—it is an age of gambling: are you quite free, may I ask? Do you never listen to that Circe, or that Par—Par—how did you call the lady?’

‘Why, madam,’ he replied, ‘how could I afford to tempt Fortune? She wants a bait or bribe; she says: “Offer me a trifle, and I will reward you with a pile of gold in guineas.” I had no money for the bribe. Otherwise I do not know what might have happened. Truly, in Ireland, some of our people are great gamesters. They play cards, they run races, they train birds and fight them. When one’s money is doled out in small sums which hardly leave a bare sufficiency for college fees and for the daily food there is no room for the card-table. Even now, when there is no longer the old restraint of poverty—*Dis aliter visum*—the Fates have ordered otherwise; my whole time and thoughts are demanded by my work. No, madam, I can frankly say that I have never been a gambler. Yet I claim no merit for this abstinence. I have been virtuous because it has been impossible for me to be anything else. Vice is a kind of tradesman or broker who gives no credit, and asks for ready money to begin with. Of ready money had I none.’

‘For my own part, also, the Fates, as you say, ordered otherwise. But, unfortunately, men and women follow their own free will—they can, if they choose, disobey the Fates. I am the daughter of a City merchant, a religious and serious merchant; and I was taught to loathe the very name of the gaming-table, where money painfully saved with many years’ labour is thrown away in a moment. Indeed, my father hated cards much as he abhorred conformity with the Church of England and all the other deadly sins. So that, when I frequented the hazard-table on Sunday, I actually broke two of the Commandments which my father, and such as my father, have added to the other Ten. “Thou shalt not play cards” is one; “Thou shalt play nothing on Sunday” is the other. Perhaps I was justly punished for my sin—sin in this respect, as I may confess to you, sir’—thus did she disguise and cover up the past, which both of them knew so well; ‘there was a time when I was much straitened by debts and liabilities entirely due to losses at the card-table.’

‘As for me,’ said Oliver, ‘I presumed, in my ignorance and folly, upon the immediate success which I thought would come to me the moment I was received at the English Bar. I was punished for this overweening vanity by a time which I may describe as straitened, although that word by no means conveys the truth.’

‘Poor man!’ sighed Isabel with compassion.

‘However, by the blessing of the Lord and the goodness of a certain person I survived. If you encourage me to speak of that person at any time, I shall be pleased—I shall feel it a duty as well as a pleasure to give you the whole of the amazing history’—thus did he interrupt himself to approach dangerously near the secret—‘the amazing

history,' he repeated, 'of goodness, of benevolence, and of charity: one may accept gifts under some circumstances, but gratitude demands acknowledgment.'

'Was it really amazing?'

She put up her fan, showing the interest which she took in the subject by the dexterous use of that feminine weapon.

'Indeed, most amazing—perhaps—another time——'

'Another time, then, Mr. Macnamara.'

So she put the further revelation of the secret aside. Why should the secret be revealed? It would then become nothing more than a memory common to both of them—a thing which might be plainly talked about.

'I could be talking always of that person. But it would fatigue you. Besides, what interest have you in that person? However, I was assisted—being in straits—and I was enabled to return without any encumbrance, and with the gain of a good deal of experience, to my chambers.'

'And then—was it immediately?—you began to succeed in your profession directly after your—return, I think you said?'

'Madam, it was immediately after my return, and it was by an accident—or by Providential care. I was in court, merely looking on. You know that briefless barristers attend the courts, not out of curiosity only, but in order to watch and to look on and to learn. A case was called in which the junior had been taken ill and could not attend. The brief was offered to me simply because I was there, on the spot, with empty hands, and the case seemed one of small importance. By great good fortune I knew the law, and could quote precedents, and could show that it was really of great importance. I

opened the case briefly, but I was able in a few words to show my knowledge and the unexpected bearings of the point at issue. My leader thanked me. The Judge complimented me. Madam, that one accident was the second step in my fortune. The first step, believe me, was nothing more or less than the most unexpected and the most astonishing goodness of that person of whom we have spoken.'

'Sir, I would not have you repeat too often your statement about the person. I do not care, I assure you, to hear too much in praise of unknown persons. Let it be rather said that your way has been laid down for you by a kind Providence. You have been marked out, selected, and trained by the act of Providence for an illustrious career. You have had an experience, let me suppose, among men less fortunate than yourself.'

'Far less fortunate, madam.'

'You will, therefore, I am sure, let me recommend to you—not that you need any such recommendation—a more than common compassion towards the poor and the friendless. You will have many opportunities of helping the unfortunate. Such compassion should stand in good stead in your profession. You will never forget, Mr. Macnamara—let me pray you never to forget your own experience—whatever it may have been—among those who were in temporary misfortune.'

She spoke with great earnestness, her eyes humid. For, indeed, she was thinking of the man in rags, of his sufferings, his humiliations, his despair, until she relieved him. The man in rags was in her mind, and the man in broad-cloth and the stuff gown knew it.

'I have been fortunate,' Isabel went on, changing the subject, which threatened to become sentimental. 'For

my father, who was displeased with me—from whom I expected nothing—whose judgments I knew to be as right as his character was austere, either designed to show his forgiveness by his will, or, which I believe to have been the case, forgot, despite his displeasure, to make any change in it. He died suddenly—I expected that he would leave the whole of his fortune to my brother, who is, in his views of religion and conduct, more austere even than he was, and regards me with great disfavour—but he died, I say, suddenly, so that if he wished he had no time at the end to make any change, and I found myself unexpectedly a woman of wealth. I live in a house such as befits my fortune, and frequent such society as belongs to my late husband's position. And now, Mr. Macnamara, I think I have talked to you enough about myself.'

They walked on together side by side in silence. But in silence one learns a good deal. There was between those two a secret tie—a bond of humiliation, and even of shame. This conversation revealed, without the necessity of clearer words, the whole of the reasons of the humiliation. The talk lifted the cloud and showed what was beneath: then the cloud fell again: but they were glad that it had been lifted.

Presently their steps took them back to the entrance of the Park. 'Come with me,' said Isabel, 'as far as the house, at least. Unless, Mr. Macnamara, you will give me the pleasure of your company to dinner, I shall be alone, save for the company of my brother-in-law, who generally sits mute and glum, wishing he was at the cockpit. I dine at two: after dinner we will sit in the drawing-room and look out upon the garden. I can offer you, I believe, a better glass of wine than you will be likely to get at the

tavern—unless the tavern has been maligned. Your chambers in the Temple, I am sure, have no such garden below them.’

Oliver laughed.

‘Truly, madam, in the tavern where I should have taken my dinner the fragrant air of your garden would be lacking. In its place there is the stinking breath of tobacco; and instead of the flowers, with their summer scent, would be the nauseous smell of yesterday’s stale wine. And, madam, in place of your society, there would be a company of lawyers and gallants, with a confused babel of noisy talk and vehement disputes. Can you doubt, madam, that I accept your invitation with joy?’

She could not doubt; his tell-tale face betrayed the satisfaction with which he received the invitation. They turned, therefore, and walked back together to St. James’s Square.

Just before they reached the door his companion touched his hand lightly with her fan, and looked up in his face with a most bewitching smile.

‘Mr. Macnamara,’ she said, ‘pray oblige me by telling that person—the amazing person—of whom you just now spoke, that, although I care not to hear her praises repeated, I am most grateful to her for the kindness she once showed you. Probably she is—ah!—a person of some little discrimination. But no one knows why any woman ever does anything. There is, of course, no credit due to her on account of that kindness; she was but a simple instrument, say, in the hands of Providence, which destined you for great things. Still, your friends would probably feel obliged to her. Probably she did not understand that she was thus led and guided by a higher Power.’

‘Madam, she shall know, I promise you, your sentiments, which are those of a kind heart. Meantime my friends have heard nothing at all about her, I assure you—nothing at all. She is one of those very rare women who do good in secret so that the left hand knows not what is done by the right. I think that she would infinitely prefer not to be talked about for her kind actions.’

You will understand that all this talk was a mere blind or pretence by which each of them desired to let the other know what had happened both before and after the day of their first meeting. It is not usual for people, as soon as they make acquaintance with each other, to exchange confidences concerning their past history and their families. For the most part, of course, people of position know the family history of those who belong to their own circles and to their own rank. When a man is received from the outside, whether (as sometimes, but very rarely, happens) he is a rich merchant, or a Nabob, or a wealthy West India planter, or a lawyer, or a poet, or a divine, the world of fashion cares nothing whatever about his origin; what does it matter where he comes from or what may have been the trade or calling of his father? The man is admitted to society because he is rich and can give entertainments, or because he can amuse—nothing more. His wife, if he has one, is not generally admitted to society, nor his daughters. Society admits those who are outside the circle in order that they may be entertained or amused. Therefore, when Isabel showed this desire to be informed of Oliver’s position and prospects, it was on account of that bond which connected them, unknown to the world, and not with any intention or hope of being either amused or entertained by the young lawyer.

After this Sunday Oliver’s visits became frequent. It



IN THE EVENING THERE WERE CARD-TABLES.



was easy by appointment to meet Isabel at the play ; he then took her home after the play ; he did not meet her again in the Park, because the summer passed into the autumn, when ladies no longer walk out in the evening ; and in the morning and the afternoon lawyers are never seen except in Westminster Hall, or on the river, going or returning. In the evening, when there were sometimes card-tables set out in Isabel's drawing-room, the young lawyer was never one of the company, being always engaged upon his work, which went on increasing by leaps and bounds. On Sundays, however, he was generally in attendance, and after morning service would repair with Isabel to St. James's Square, where he dined and spent the afternoon in conversation, in reading, or in music. It is rare for a sprig of Quality to have learned any single accomplishment—most of them, therefore, are dull dogs—but this young man, who was not a sprig of Quality, had a delicate touch on the harpsichord and a flexible and musical voice. He played very prettily, and knew a great number of Irish songs, the words of which he had himself composed to the melodies sung by the common people ; they were melancholy, for the most part, and yet strangely sweet.

There is certainly nothing more delightful or more useful for a young man than the intimate friendship of a gentlewoman, sympathetic, affectionate, kindly, especially so long as the friendship remains apart from passion. And to most women there is nothing more delightful than the confidence, the unfolding of the secret hopes and aims, the baring of the soul, of a young man of promise and of great ambitions. Perhaps—but one knows not—the voice of scandal found something to say about those Sundays ; Isabel disturbed herself little about the voice of scandal.

She neither listened to it nor looked for it. One person alone ventured upon a remonstrance.

This was the Right Honourable the Earl of Stratherrick, Isabel's brother-in-law. When, which happened every month, his monthly stipend was exhausted, his lordship honoured Isabel by his company at her table. He there met Oliver, and after his wont towards persons of lower rank or no rank at all, treated him with scant courtesy, conduct which respect for rank and for Isabel's house prevented the lawyer from receiving with like rudeness.

The contempt of one whose vices have ruined him, who is a beggar and a dependent, ought to be received with corresponding contempt by one who earns his livelihood by an honourable and a noble profession. And so, indeed, Oliver endeavoured to receive it. At the same time, a lawyer is a gentleman, and is at least entitled to consideration.

Isabel, however, resented his lordship's behaviour.

'If,' she said, 'you honour me with your company, my lord, I must insist upon due respect being paid to my friends.'

'Certainly, Isabel. But an adventurer, a mere Irish adventurer, a common lawyer! One does not expect to find such company as a common Irish adventurer at the table of a woman in your position. Remember, if you please, that you are my sister-in-law.'

'Mr. Macnamara is no more of an adventurer than any gentleman who has been called to the Bar, and I would have you know that he is one of my friends.'

'The world will be talking, Isabel. I, who know the polite world—which you do not—can tell you that the world is talking.'

'Let the world talk ; it will not spoil good company. If

I do not know the polite world, it is quite unnecessary for me to regard what it says or thinks. And, my lord,' she added, with a heightened colour, 'let me beg of you not to talk, whatever this world may say, about my friends or about any company whom you may meet in this house. Remember, my lord, I entreat you, that the house is mine. Should you feel inclined to insult any guest of mine, it will be better for you to dine at one of the excellent taverns which, I am told, are to be found at this end of the town.'

'As you please, Isabel. You have the command of the purse. At the same time, you cannot deny that I have the advantage in birth and rank. I know, and I am able to tell you, what the world says.'

'You hear it, I suppose, at your cockpit, among the scum and the dregs that form the company at that delightful place.'

'Perhaps. It would be well for you, however, to hear and to consider carefully what the world says about your reception of this young lawyer. I presume that even the daughter of a Nonconformist merchant has a reputation to lose. Your alliance with my house, Isabel, entails certain obligations—certain obligations.'

This dependent—this ruined gambler—could at times, and on occasions, assume some of the dignity of his rank.

Isabel laughed. His assumption of dignity did not impress her.

'There is one very powerful consideration,' she said, 'which ought to move your lordship more than most men, because you have waited so long and so fruitlessly upon Fortune. There are some who bring bad luck, and some who bring good luck, to their friends. Mr. Macnamara is one of those who bring good luck. If disagreeable

things were to happen to me, I assure you that it is to him I should turn, and not to you, or to anyone of rank or fashion. Oh, not to you at all!

‘ Good luck? Good luck? How do you mean, Isabel? Does he—does he play?’

She laughed again.

‘ He does not play, yet he brings good luck.’

These words, as you shall hear, proved prophetic.

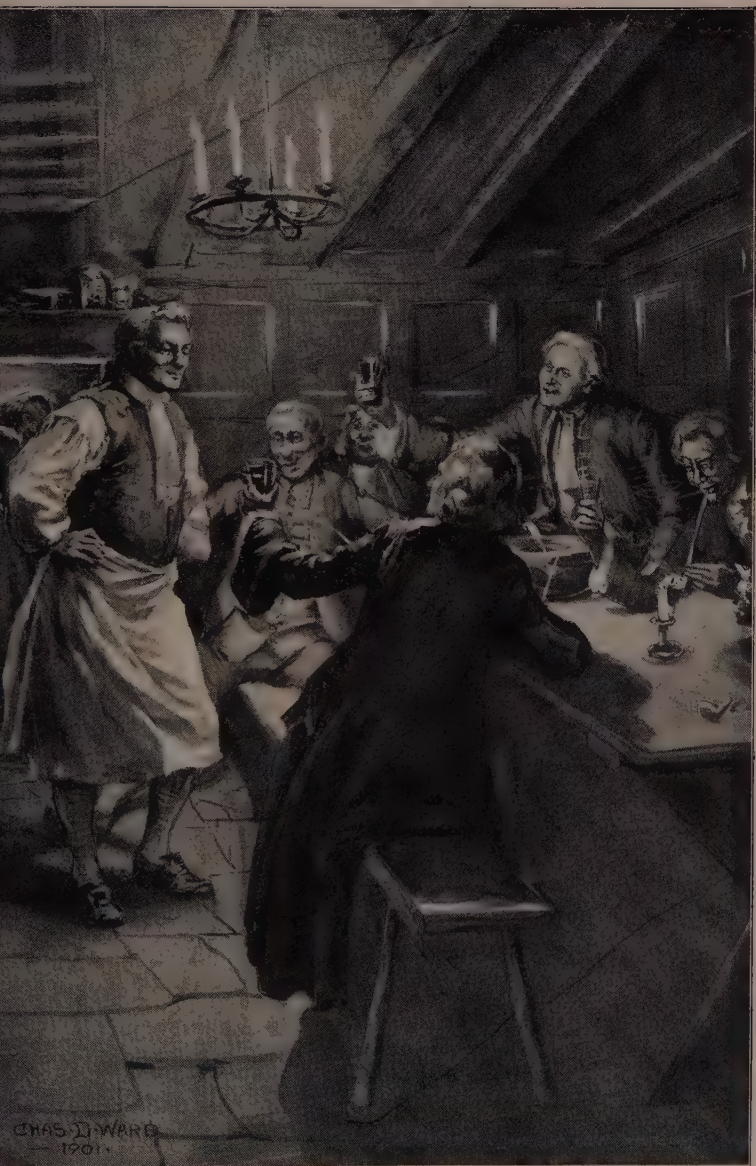
CHAPTER VIII

BACKSTAIRS RUMOURS

LORD STRATHERRICK, in the days of his prosperity, had retained a valet among his livery. This faithful creature remained with his lordship, submissive to his master's ill-humours and evil temper, during the whole period of his career as a gambler and sportsman—that is to say, to the very end of his fortune; in fact, as long as there was anything to be made out of his master, this loyal-hearted servant remained with him. Everybody knows that the position of valet to a nobleman may be one of considerable value, on account of the perquisites, so long as his lordship has anything left. Thus, there are tradesmen of every kind anxious to serve the noble house; presents to the valet in return for custom are not only expected, but openly demanded and thought to be right and proper. In some cases even the master shares, though this is considered scarcely honourable. When his lordship, as continually happens, is a gambler, presents in return for information as to his proceedings, horses, haunts and places where he may be expected to lay bets, are freely offered to the valet by those who would, if they could, win his lordship's money. Then, again, there are bribes by which those who desire to escape their creditors by joining a nobleman's household must approach the subject.

And there are many other ways of emoluments known to the profession of valet, and practised up and down the backstairs, which are, indeed, a kind of Exchange or Bourse for this kind of commercial enterprise. In other words, the code of honour with a gentleman's gentleman is what the world would call tortuous.

When, however, the last coppice had been felled and sold, when the last acre had fallen into the hands of the money-lender, when the last picture had been taken down from the family gallery and put up at auction, when his lordship was finally compelled to retire to his country seat, from which he had sold all the furniture, collections, pictures, books, tapestry, armour, plate and everything, and to live in a little corner, while the old house fell into ruin and decay over his head, then, of course, nobody could expect the valet to look out for another corner of the house for his own accommodation. Besides, who would pay his wages? And what had become of the perquisites? Mr. Pinder—his name was Pinder—therefore left his master, and, being by that time possessed of considerable savings, he took a tavern in Jermyn Street. It was the house standing at the corner of Duke Street, called the Grapes, well known, and even celebrated, among the profession of gentlemen's gentlemen—valet, lackey, footman, coachman, butler, hall-porter—as a House of Call sacred to themselves. In this place he established himself as landlord; and as he knew his customers, their habits, their weaknesses, their temptations, their tastes, and their inclinations, he gave them, to begin with, a comfortable parlour, always freshly sanded, with armchairs and a hospitable fire all the year round; he studied the art of brewing punch, and he acquired the reputation of compounding for their use a liquor which was far better,



HE STUDIED THE ART OF BREWING PUNCH.

stronger, sweeter, and more thoroughly mixed and more finely finished off, than any punch which is made and offered at the ordinary taverns for the noblemen and gentlemen their masters. No one knows better than the butler and the valet what good wine, good punch, and good ale should mean. And Mr. Pinder recognised this superiority of taste.

Out of respect and consideration for old times, the ex-valet, Mr. Pinder, the landlord of the Grapes Tavern, waited obediently upon his former master when the latter came back to London. The event naturally coincided very nearly with Isabel's succession to her fortune, for his lordship, who had hitherto been accustomed to sneer and scoff at his sister-in-law as the mere daughter of a plain cit, unworthy of any social consideration, and, still worse, quite poor and unprovided for, now became eager to share in her good fortune. He left his tumble-down mansion and hastened to London with the intention of getting his finger in the pie.

He came; he found Isabel engaged in settling herself in one of the finest houses of St. James's Square, with a wealthy country Baronet on one side of her and a noble lord in the Ministry on the other. This was even better than he had been led to expect: a few thousands, perhaps—such a fortune as many a merchant gives his daughter—would be, he thought, the outside of all. He would himself be able to advise upon the investment of her money. Another mortgage or two upon his own property—already mortgaged for more than its value—would be a way of dealing with it. For himself, he would get money again—ready money—money in hand—money with which he could once more tempt Fortune. After so many years the tide of luck would turn; he would win all back again; he

would repay Isabel; he would—he would—he would—ah! The gambler's anticipation of the future is like a summer's sunset, in which there are castles and domes and stately mansions in the sky, but all blurred with the gorgeous colouring of imagination, possessing neither true shape nor distinct outline. There is no purpose in such a dream; it is but a vision, and it fades and is forgotten.

No one, in a word, would believe it possible that a woman could be so firm and so hard.

'Your lordship,' said Isabel, 'mistakes me altogether. I am a woman, yet not a fool; I know, for instance, that your estates are mortgaged for every possible penny. You need not, therefore, seek to impose upon me by any pretence——'

'Impose upon you, Isabel? I impose upon you?'

'Use any words you please. That is the sense of it. Well, my lord, I understand so much of business to know that lending a man money without security is like throwing it into the ocean.'

'Isabel, your language—your suspicions—are painful.'

'I also know that to lend a gambler money is equivalent to throwing it into the sea. You will take all that you can get; you will carry it to the cockpit. Fie, my lord! will nothing cure you?'

'Not if I use the money on my estates.'

'You cannot. Your estates are in the hands of the money-lenders. Besides, my lord, I have been a gambler myself, and I know what the passion means. It is incurable. The only chance is never to go near a card-table, and when you hear the crowing of a cock to stop both your ears and to run away.'

She laughed, but Lord Stratherrick looked mighty serious.

‘It is very hard,’ he said. ‘I heard of your good fortune, Isabel. I said to myself: “She will want an adviser to keep her out of mischief. I will go to London. I will leave my present concerns to take care of themselves.”’

‘All this is very good of you. In return, my lord, I have thought over what I can do for you. What,’ she added thoughtfully, ‘is the best thing I can do for you.’

‘Yes—yes? What is the best thing, Isabel?’

‘You want to live in London. You hanker after the taverns and the cockpits and all the dear delights of your wicked town. Very well. Now, I will do this for you. I will give you a respectable lodging—not a house, but two rooms—and I will further make you an allowance of sixteen guineas a month.’

‘Sixteen—sixteen guineas, Isabel? ’Twill not serve for a bottle of wine a day.’

‘Sixteen guineas, my lord—neither more nor less. I will not consent to keep you in the style befitting your rank, nor to give you money to throw away in the old fashion. Sixteen guineas. If you spend that money before the end of the month, you will get no more. If you run into debt, you will pay your debts yourself; fortunately, they cannot arrest you.’

‘Sixteen guineas, Isabel—sixteen! Consider! ’Tis the pay of a country Vicar. ’Tis beneath my position even to listen to such a miserable proposal.’

‘Sixteen guineas. And you must promise, further, that you will not part with any of the external signs of your rank. If you walk with me, I choose that all the world shall know that my companion is a man of rank. Do you consent?’

Her face was laughing, but her eyes were hard. He hesitated.

‘That, my lord, is nothing.’

‘I consent,’ he replied.

It was on this occasion that his lower lip was pushed out another half-inch, where it remained, as has been observed already in the course of this history.

However, Lord Stratherrick returned no more to the country seat, but remained in London, living as best he could upon the allowance of sixteen guineas. It was not the manner of life to which he had been accustomed. There were no crowds of suitors, no levées. No one came to solicit his lordship’s influence; no one came to tell him of a bird invincible, a horse of swiftness unsurpassed, a master of fence never conquered; no one solicited a place in his household. He had no household; he had no servants. Further, he had no friends; a ruined gambler terrifies people. They fear that he will play and lose and be unable to pay; or that he will bet and be unable to pay; or that he will try to borrow money. It cannot be said that Lord Stratherrick was happy or comfortable, or that he regarded Isabel with gratitude, affection, or even respect. A woman who had so much and would give her noble brother-in-law so little was unworthy of respect, gratitude or affection.

No friends? One friend remained. There was little to be got out of a ruined gambler, but Mr. Pinder, formerly valet, now landlord of the Grapes, thought there might still be something. Where there are rich relations there are always possibilities; where there is rank there is always a chance; where there is a past history with past scandals, there are always hopes. If we inquire too closely into motives, as every monger of scandal does, we might

even be disappointed by finding the old and half-forgotten duties of loyalty and obedience still surviving. Lest we light upon them, let us not search into the reason which impelled Mr. Pinder to renew to a certain extent the old allegiance, and to become, if no longer his lordship's valet, then his confidential adviser. He discussed important affairs with him—that is to say, affairs of the cockpit; he obtained information for him from his customers, which enabled his lordship to lose the greater part of his sixteen guineas. He made advances of small sums, a guinea or two at a time. The honest valet, in fact, did his best under the circumstances, and took every possible precaution to insure that three-fourths of that miserable allowance should pass into his own hands. If any perquisites remained—there are always, for instance, broken tradesmen seeking protection from their debtors by means of an imaginary place in a nobleman's household—Mr. Pinder had these perquisites.

He was useful still in some ways. He could provide at his tavern a good dinner and an excellent bottle of wine for his master when the allowance permitted; he could find out for him, through the company which frequented his parlour, private information as to all kinds of sport, and especially as to the personal courage and the stay of gamecocks preparing for the Gray's Inn Cockpit, where among the mixed company Lord Stratherrick sat every night laying the odds in half-crowns. A half-crown is not much; but, then, it is very well known that the eagerness with which your true gamester follows fortune in any kind of sport does not at all depend upon the magnitude of the sum at stake. The ordinary player, the mere onlooker, regards his stake as if it were the only interest concerned; the true gamester watches the progress, step by step, of

the events ; he forgets the amount involved ; money is to him merely a means of observing the winding ways of Fortune and of discovering—which he never succeeds in doing—how she works, by what methods she strips her votaries, and how he may deceive and outwit her. While he is learning, however, Fortune is stripping him. And this, and none other, is the reason why men are known to lose thousands, tens of thousands, in a single night ; in the eager following of the various changes and chances of Fortune, they do not understand the magnitude of the stakes, or the effect upon their own affairs. It is the man who plays to win and nothing else, who thinks about the stakes and nothing else, not your true gamester, who, when he has lost his all, goes out and puts a pistol to his mouth.

Lord Stratherrick's new residence was in King Street, beside St. James's Square. The lodging, which was decent, but not such as one would expect for a nobleman of his rank, consisted of two rooms. The occupant was generally dressed by noon, when he sallied forth and took the air in the Park for an hour or two, having a morning drink, and generally his dinner, at the tavern of his old servant. After dinner he repaired to a coffee-house, avoiding those frequented by his old friends, who no longer courted his society. Who cares for the company of an old friend after he is ruined ? At six or seven he rose and made his way to his cockpit, where he enjoyed the fluctuations of Fortune quite as much as if he were losing another fortune. Somewhere about midnight he returned to his lodging. It was now a monotonous life, with no friends and no companions ; but this was not the part of it which he regretted the most. He looked back to a place crowded with gentlemen, some of whom covered their eyes with

green shades; some of whom sat with coats turned inside out for luck; while some watched the birds with faces in which no one could discern the least emotion, though their whole future hung upon the event; and some shouted or wept as Fortune smiled or frowned. He himself had been one of the passionless players. This life it was that he regretted; he played still, but among a company who were not ashamed to lament aloud over the loss of a guinea, who were broken at the loss of five guineas; and if they lost more went out upon the roads round London, armed with a pair of pistols, mounted on a horse borrowed of a thief-taker, and were presently carried along the Oxford Road in a cart to Tyburn Tree.

One morning when he had dined at the Grapes, sitting, of course, in the best room, not among the lackeys, his former valet waited upon him, with a face full of mystery. He was a man who knew how to excite and to stimulate curiosity, and had generally some scandal to impart. In appearance he was a white-faced man, somewhat corpulent, who moved silently, as if with deference to his company. A perfectly well-bred servant in his manners, equipped with all the vices of his order—its basenesses, its corruptions, its lack of honour and of honesty.

He waited upon his old master, removed his napkin, took off the cloth, set his pint of wine on the table before him, and behaved with as much care and attention as if he were still in his lordship's service. On the other hand, the former master behaved with more than the ancient haughtiness. Both knew how to play their parts.

'My lord,' said Mr. Pinder, when he had poured out the first glass for him, 'there is a little matter on which, with your permission, I would speak.'

‘If it is a matter of money, Pinder——’

‘It is not a matter of your lordship’s money.’

‘Because, if so, you would have to wait, as you very well know. Pray, then, what is it? If it is anybody else’s money, what has it to do with me?’

‘It is of some importance. It is an affair of family importance, my lord, and of the greatest delicacy.’

‘Pshaw! Family importance! Delicacy! I have no one to consider except cousins.’

‘Not cousins, my lord. Your cousins have done nothing that I know of. They are still living in the country, and hunting the fox. The matter concerns a person much nearer to your lordship than all your cousins.’

‘Who the devil is it? Don’t beat about the bush, Pinder.’

‘My lord, there is, as perhaps you may have heard, a kind of club, or assembly of gentlemen’s servants, in my parlour downstairs every evening. Some of them are disengaged; some are in places. Sometimes the parlour is full; sometimes there are but two or three.’

‘Pinder, do you imagine that I concern myself about your lackeys and their doings?’

‘Not so, my lord. Certainly not. Still, on this occasion you will concern yourself. Last night there were but two or three. Among them was one, valet to Lord Elrington. He comes to the house regularly every evening because his master is now old, and goes not forth any more. Last night he brought with him a man whom, I must say, for his rags and his poverty, I should not have admitted to my house, which has always been respectable and select.’

‘Well, you let in the man of rags. What has this rag-bag to do with me?’

‘Presently, my lord—immediately. Pray grant me your lordship’s attention. He was the kind of man that one sees in the Fleet, or any other debtors’ prison—a man fallen into rags all over, with a face that betokened strong drink, and as much of it as he could take. At first sight, I took him for a man who had drunk away his fortune.’

‘Again, Pinder, how am I concerned about your man of rags and tatters?’

‘Lord Elrington’s valet is a friend of mine. He can do what he pleases in my house. So he brought the man, but left him outside in the bar. “Pinder,” he said, “here is a poor devil who says he is a cousin of mine. I don’t know on which side, or how near. You see, he is in rags; he is also penniless; yet he was formerly a reputable citizen and draper of Ludgate Hill. In the days of his prosperity he would not acknowledge a cousin who wore a livery. Things are changed now, Pinder; he is glad to remember the connection. Give him drink and a plate of victuals, and I will pay.” Those were his words, my lord.’

‘I must have another pint, Pinder. This story is much too long-winded for a single pint.’

‘Immediately, my lord. When this poor man had refreshed himself with a plate of cold beef and a tankard of strong ale—he ate little meat, but asked for a second tankard of ale—I asked him how he, once a reputable citizen, had fallen into such straits. “Ah!” he said with a sigh, “I should not have been a bankrupt but for a lady of quality.” Now, my lord, we come to the important point. “A lady of quality,” he said.’

‘Who was the lady of quality?’

Lord Stratherrick expected to hear one of those scandals

which are whispered about with the air of great secrecy, and concern nobody.

‘He went on: “She was a widow—the widow of an Honourable.”’

Lord Stratherrick lifted his head. He became suddenly interested.

‘Who is the lady?’ he repeated.

‘I am coming to that,’ the man replied with irritating slowness. “Widow of an Honourable,” he said. And then he told me the story. The lady owed him money—many hundreds of pounds he said; the credit was overdue by six months; he could not get the bill paid; there were many other bills owing to him, but all except this were small. He wrote to the lady; he told her of his situation; he pointed out that he must fail unless he could recover these debts, of which hers was the chief. He went to see her, and found that she had no intention of paying him. He therefore resolved upon obtaining a writ. Meantime—your lordship must have heard of such things—the lady sent him word that she had transferred her liabilities to a man in Newgate—a wretch condemned to death, whom she had just married, in order to save herself from a prison.’

‘I have heard of such things. I believe they are not uncommon. The name of the lady, Pinder?’

‘The blow finished him. He became bankrupt, and he has been starving ever since. To look at him, one would think that he lived upon strong ale, punch and purl. For his hands do so shake, and his lips do so tremble, and his voice is so thick.’

‘Pray, Pinder—pray, why do you occupy my time with this story? What do I care about a bankrupt shopman?’

‘It is not on his account at all, my lord. I would let him go hang. I could not think of wasting your lordship’s time on such a creature. It is on account of the lady’s name.’

‘Ah! The lady’s name . . . her name . . . but I care no longer about these scandals.’

Mr. Pinder placed his thumbs on the table, leaned over it, and whispered :

‘My lord, the lady is none other than the widow of your lordship’s brother, the late Honourable Mr. Ronald Weyland, Commissioner for the Hanaper.’

Lord Stratherrick received this intelligence in silence. His face assumed a stony indifference.

‘Oh! The widow of my brother,’ he said, after a pause. ‘Really!’

‘The same, my lord—none other.’

‘Well, Pinder?’

‘Well, my lord, that is surely enough.’

‘Oh!’ His lordship sat drumming the table with his knuckles awhile in silence. ‘The man is hanged, I suppose?’

‘I believe so, my lord, long ago.’

‘In that case no harm can happen to Mrs. Weyland.’

‘With submission, my lord—the scandal——’

‘Pinder, you were in my household for twelve years. There were a good many scandals of various kinds during that period. My history is full of scandals. Am I any the worse?’

Pinder looked round the room as if finding a reply in the meanness of the lodging. It certainly was not, as has been said, a habitation fit for an Earl.

‘As your lordship pleases,’ he said dryly.

‘Do you think I care for a scandal? I have outlived

too many. But, Pinder, if you can lay your hand upon this man——'

'I can, at any time.'

'And if you choose to bring him here, being careful not to let him know that the lady is my sister-in-law, I should, perhaps, be able to make it worth your while.'

'I can bring him whenever you please, my lord.'

'Very good. And, Pinder, hold your tongue about the matter. It must be between you and me.'

Pinder brought him a second pint of wine and retired softly. He knew perfectly well what was in his former master's mind. His lordship would try to make of this discovery a weapon for the extortion of money from the lady. Pinder resolved upon getting the lion's share of that money for himself. A ragged wretch, out at elbows, penniless, and always thirsty, could, with a little care, be managed to the advantage either of lord or of valet. Naturally, his own interests were concerned with the latter.

Lord Stratherrick sat all the afternoon over that second pint. He had no knowledge that at any time Isabel had been straitened for money ; he had no suspicion ; the story took him wholly by surprise ; that she, of all women in the world, should have been tempted to shift her liabilities by an act which the most elastic code of honour cannot approve was almost incredible.

He might have gone to her ; he might have told her, in whispers, what he had discovered ; but he must first see this bibulous bankrupt.

He presently resolved upon one step. He took pen and paper and wrote a case which he called 'For Counsel's Opinion.' It was as follows :

'A. B., a young widow, finds herself in debt. In order

to get rid of her debts without paying them, she contracts a marriage with C. D., a felon lying in the condemned cells of Newgate, and about to be hanged. He therefore becomes liable for her debts. The lady subsequently becomes wealthy. She is free from the power of the law ; is she not, however, morally liable for the full amount ? Ought she not to pay those debts ?

He sallied forth and repaired to his attorney, his man of business when he had business to transact.

‘I want this case,’ he said, ‘submitted to counsel. I want it submitted to the counsel whose name is on the back.’

The attorney read the case.

‘Why, my lord,’ he said, ‘there needs no opinion of counsel in this case ; the law is quite plain and simple. The husband takes over the debts ; the creditors cannot touch the lady.’

‘Very good. But about the moral obligation ?’

‘My lord, the law does not recognise moral obligations. That is a case for conscience.’

‘Yet I want an opinion, and from the counsel whom I have named.’

The attorney looked at the name—‘Macnamara, of the Inner Temple.’

‘I do not know him ; yet I think I have heard the name. As your lordship pleases. Do you wish your name to be made known to this young man ?’

‘No, sir, I do not. Please get the opinion speedily, and send it to me.’

CHAPTER IX

AN UNFORTUNATE FAMILY

A FEW days after the meeting in St. James's Church, Isabel met with another adventure of a most unexpected character, one which reminded her, in a very disagreeable manner, of the past. She thought it was done with. For nearly three years she had kept it at the back of her mind with so much resolution that it had become a mere cloud, dark and charged with thunder, but too far off to alarm her. If she thought at all about it, she hastened to put the thought away from her; it was done, and could never be discovered. Yet the meeting with Oliver Macnamara had brought back the whole to her mind. She was pleased to renew the acquaintance so strangely begun; yet it raised the dead, it restored the memory of her shame and humiliation, and of her short way with creditors. This new adventure did more: it was threatening, it endangered, as she very well understood, her peace of mind; it was likely to bring her again into contact with the man whose bill she had shifted to the shoulders of a condemned criminal.

Soon or late, for most of us, the past finds us out: if not in the resurrection of the flesh, so to speak—that is to say, in the appearance of fellow-sinners or the reproaches of sufferers—then in shame and self-reproach and self-con-

demnation. The man Fulton could not greatly harm Isabel, but she trembled at the mere thought of what he might say. He could not harm her, but he might harm her self-esteem and reveal to the world—somehow, she knew not how—the thing of which she had been guilty, or, which was as bad, he could in some way bring home to her the consequences of her act.

Truly, that man or woman is but a little way advanced in Grace—an old-fashioned gift—who can forgive himself, when he considers how many have been injured by his misdeeds: the innocent children; the innocent wife condemned—by him—to a life of privation and humiliation; the tender girls condemned—by him—to take a humble station of dependence; the gallant boys, who might have had ways of distinction and wealth open to them, condemned—by him—to servitude and penury. With what face can he ask forgiveness of his sins when the mischief he has done still lives and bears its baleful fruit of undeserved suffering? He cannot ask forgiveness. As soon as he understands what his actions mean, he must be content to bow his head and to pray that somehow the suffering he has inflicted upon others may be laid upon himself until the consequences have died away and are forgotten. Isabel was about to realize what her actions meant for others, the innocent and the helpless. One can imagine the offender finding out those whom he has injured; one can imagine him going round, hat in hand, humbly begging forgiveness and offering atonement; but suppose they cannot be found; suppose they refuse to forgive; suppose the offender cannot calculate the injury done to them and to posterity!

Isabel's crime was to find her out, and that in a way which no one could have expected or feared. True, the

young lawyer whom she had befriended had met and recognised her ; but he knew nothing of the crowning act ; the sight of him recalled an act of charity and pity which it was not displeasing to remember ; they had the same secret shared between them ; but they spoke no more of it. He was, besides, an agreeable friend and companion in whose society she took great pleasure, who gave her thoughts more change and her life more variety. She did not regret the meeting. Now, however, she was to meet with others connected with that day of fate. Rarely, says the poet, does Punishment, though lame and halt, fail to seize upon the flying sinner.

While the man Pinder, landlord of the Grapes, was revealing part of the hidden portion of Isabel's life to her brother-in-law, she, all unconscious, was in Mrs. Brymer's shop, engaged in the ever-delightful task of making preparations for a new dress. The foundation was, I believe, a gray silk, deliciously cool to the eye and soft to the touch—a foundation on which was to be built I know not what of a complicated superstructure of lace, ribbons and embroidery over a petticoat of pink silk with more lace and more embroidery. The dress would cost more than the whole sum of which she had defrauded her creditors. But of this she was not thinking.

The very last thing, indeed, that Isabel was thinking of was this comparison of her past and her present conditions. She chose the materials, she agreed with Mrs. Brymer about the treatment of her materials, and, when all was arranged, she gathered up her fan and her gloves and walked into the outer shop or ante-room. In the street her chariot was waiting for her.

Mrs. Brymer followed her, talking volubly. Now, as Isabel walked through the shop she passed a couple in



SHE STOPPED AND ADDRESSED THE GIRL.

serious conversation—one of them, she knew, was Mrs. Brymer's forewoman; the other was a girl, apparently a workgirl, poorly clad. As Isabel passed, the girl sobbed aloud. Isabel was of a kindly heart—one of those who cannot bear to hear a girl, a woman, or a child, cry if they can prevent it by gifts or by kind words. So she stopped and addressed the girl. 'Child,' she said, in her kindly, soft, and sympathetic voice, 'what is the matter?'

Here Mrs. Brymer plucked at her elbow, and whispered, 'Leave her alone. Leave her alone, madam. Have nothing to do with her.'

But Isabel would not leave her alone. 'What is it?' she repeated.

'Madam,' the forewoman appealed to Mrs. Brymer, 'I would engage her if I could. But, indeed, her work is not good enough for us.'

'Who are you, my dear?' Isabel asked.

'Madam,' the girl made answer through her sobs, 'I hoped to get work—and my work is not good enough.'

'Give her half a guinea and let her go,' whispered Mrs. Brymer, pulling again at Isabel's sleeve.

Isabel took no notice of this appeal. She persisted:

'You can get work elsewhere, child, where the work is not so fine. But why do you cry about it?'

'Alas, madam! my mother is ill abed, and can do nothing, and my brother has run away to sea.'

'Have you no father?'

'I have a father, madam, but—but he roams all day from tavern to tavern.'

Isabel looked at her more curiously. She was a girl with a face that should have been lovely, but it was pinched with privation; and with a figure which should have been set off with a becoming garb, but she was in

rags ; with eyes large and limpid, and a fine profusion of light brown hair. Her voice was low and soft.

‘Your father does no work, then?’

The girl hung her head, but made no reply.

‘Where is your home?’

Here Mrs. Brymer plucked her again by the sleeve.

‘A word in private with your ladyship,’ she said. ‘This girl’—taking her into a corner of the shop—‘is none other than the daughter of the man—you must remember—named Fulton, once a draper on Ludgate Hill.’

‘What? The man I caused to be a bankrupt?’

‘Nay, madam ; he was already a bankrupt. A respectable tradesman does not fail for so small a sum. I believe your debt should by rights have been paid to his creditors.’

‘But he told me——’

‘Oh yes, he told you ! Does it signify a button what he told you? Besides, I know the man. He was for ever drinking at the tavern with his pothouse companions when he ought to have been minding the shop. Be easy, madam, about the bankruptcy.’

‘I cannot be easy about it.’

‘As for the girl, give her half a guinea, then, and let her go.’

‘Nay ; I will inquire into her circumstances first.’

‘As you will. But she will do you a mischief. Mind, madam, for sure and certain you will bring a mischief upon your own head, and through this girl.’

‘A mischief ! What mischief can this child do to me?’

‘As your ladyship pleases.’

Isabel looked again at the girl. She stood still, resigned, the tears on her cheeks. She was too thin, too frail, to bear the blow of penury, and she was far too lovely to face the world alone and penniless.

‘Mrs. Brymer,’ she said, ‘I am concerned with this girl’s distress. I must help her. I must do something for her mother and herself.’

She returned to the girl.

‘Will you take me to your house? Where do you live?’

The girl mentioned one of the narrow streets on the north side of Long Acre—a street, if Isabel had known, of a bad reputation for poverty and for vice.

‘But,’ she said, ‘I know not how long we shall be allowed to stay there, nor whither we shall go when we are turned into the street for not paying the rent.’

‘Are things so bad, then?’

‘We are only allowed to stay on out of charity. We may be turned out any day.’

‘What would you do then?’

‘Find an empty house to starve in; lie on shavings; go out and beg. Madam, what can we do?’

‘Heavens!’ cried Isabel.

‘Mother will die. Oh, she will die—she will die!’ and she began again to sob.

Isabel took her by the arm and led her to the door.

‘I will see your lodging and your mother,’ she said, pushing her into the chariot.

The coach rumbled along over the stones. As it rolled the wheels began to speak, but she alone heard what they said. ‘Your handiwork!’ they grumbled, ‘your handiwork! This ruin, this misery—your handiwork! your handiwork!’

She laid her hands again upon the girl’s arm.

‘My dear,’ she said, ‘you shall not be turned into the street, nor shall you be forced to starve.’

She said no more because she choked, but the tears

stood in her eyes, and her spirits fell like lead, and the rumbling wheels growled : ‘ Your handiwork ! your handiwork ! your handiwork ! This ruin, this misery, these tears—your handiwork ! your handiwork ! your handiwork !’

The girl stopped the coach at the entrance of a narrow street of mean houses, little more than a court. They got down. She led the way along the footway—there was but one—covered with all kinds of refuse : bones, heads and tails of fish, cabbage-stumps, turnip peelings, old shoes, and broken pots and kettles. The cobbled pavement was in holes, and in parts almost gone, leaving puddles broad and deep. There were no lamps. From the windows dangled clothes hung out to dry. The windows that were shut had the broken panes stuffed with rags.

‘ It is a poor street,’ said the girl. ‘ Our house is the poorest in the street ; and our room is the poorest in the house. Will your ladyship excuse the poverty ?’

She led the way up the stairs. The banisters were broken away ; here and there a step had vanished ; it had been pulled up and burned to warm a room by some cold tenant ; those that were left were an inch and more deep in dirt ; they seemed to have known no scrubbing-brush since the house was built.

On the second floor, at the back, was the room in which this unfortunate family had found their last shelter. They could fall no lower, unless they were turned into the street and had to find refuge in an empty house. In the month of July one wants no fire, which was fortunate ; one wants food, however, and there was no sign of any ; the cupboard door stood open : there was a pewter plate in it, there was a knife, there was a jug of common ware, and that was all—not a sign of anything to eat, no sign of coals, no sign of cooking vessels.

Isabel looked round this miserable refuge. On a low truckle bed, one leg of which had been burned for fuel and was replaced by a brick, lay a woman, apparently in a starving condition. Her eyes were closed; her cheek was pinched and white; but her face was delicate—it looked like the face of a gentlewoman. She was covered by a petticoat. There was no furniture save the bed—not a curtain to the window, not a chair or a table. There were no clothes hanging up, not a change of any kind. There was not even a tub for washing: there was nothing at all—nothing. And in her brain rang the words like a peal of bells, ‘Your handiwork! your handiwork!’ Destitution could get no farther; this unfortunate pair had reached the very bottom rung of the ladder; below them lay starvation—a painful path to be trodden, before they should reach the Grave, which is also the Gate of Life.

Isabel’s heart sank, her conscience smote her, her voice failed, she choked, she sobbed.

The woman on the bed opened her eyes.

‘Madam!’ she murmured in wonder, not understanding.

Then Isabel recovered herself.

‘Child’—taking out her purse—‘go this moment! What are you standing there for, doing nothing? Haste, haste! Buy a basket; bring back food—anything—food—do you hear? A bottle of wine, bread, cold beef, what you can get—and strawberries. There are strawberries and cherries in the market. Covent Garden is close at hand. Go this moment! Oh, how slow the girl is! The money—I forgot the money—here, child! Don’t look at me—don’t stare—run—run!’

She took the girl by the shoulders and pushed her out

of the room, for, indeed, the girl seemed not to understand.

When she was gone, Isabel turned to the woman on the bed.

‘Your daughter,’ she said, ‘has told me that you were poor, but I was not prepared for poverty such as this. Have you no friends who can help you?’

‘My husband had tavern friends once. They give him food still from time to time, but their patience is exhausted. He has cousins and relations, too, but he has tired them out. They will not help him any more; they are tired of helping him, and he, poor man, cannot help himself.’

‘Can he not find employment?’

‘Alas, madam! one who has been himself in business knows too much to be employed as a salesman. They will not have a bankrupt. They mistrust an unfortunate man. Besides, they want a young man; and my husband’s character, I am ashamed to say, is gone. He has always been too fond of the tavern.’

The woman’s voice was soft and gentle, and her manner was better than one expects in such a position.

‘Tell me,’ said Isabel, ‘about yourself.’

‘I have nothing to tell, madam. I had two children—a brave boy and a good girl. My brave boy ran away from our miserable home, and has gone off to sea; my poor girl is good still, thank God! But you have seen her.’

‘She is a pretty girl; it is dangerous for her to be in this poverty.’

The woman clasped her hands.

‘I have but one prayer left,’ she said. ‘I pray daily that we may both starve rather than that she should yield to temptation.’

‘You must be taken out of this place,’ said Isabel. ‘You must be carried to a lodging where you will have pure air and a clean house and——’

‘Madam, madam!’—the woman half raised herself on her elbow. ‘In the name of *God*, who are you? Some angel, sure. Oh! It is three years since misfortune fell upon us; no one has befriended us; no one has visited us; a bankrupt and a bankrupt’s wife are like two tainted sheep in the flock. They tossed us a few shillings at first, but they soon left us to our misery. And you, a stranger, find us out—and you——’

She could say no more; she turned her head upon the miserable sacking that made her pillow, and she sobbed in silence.

Isabel stood watching her, the tears rolling down her cheeks. This was her doing; this was her handiwork; by her own wickedness she had brought the poor woman to this misery. Never before had she understood what the consequences of her actions might be. This woman, sinking deeper and deeper into misery undeserved, and she herself living in luxury and comfort; her very conscience quiet and still, unmindful of what might happen!

‘I thank God,’ she murmured, but the other did not understand, ‘that I have found you.’

Then the girl returned with a basket filled with the things she had brought. She gazed with wonder at her benefactress. Why was the lady crying? However, Isabel dried her tears and assumed a cheerfulness which she did not feel.

‘The first thing,’ said Isabel, ‘is to take some food—both of you. What! there is but one knife? We must provide two, at least, for the future. Meantime we

may make the one knife do. Only one plate? Then, you poor soul! you must have the plate, and your daughter must have a platter of bread. So now eat, drink, and refresh yourselves.'

When the meal was finished, 'Now, child,' said Isabel, 'come with me in search of lodgings. We must find rooms with a purer air, nearer the country, better furnished. Oh, be assured, we shall take care of you.'

They found lodgings easily in one of the new houses beside the Foundling Hospital, a quarter which is close to the green fields and the country, where the air is fresh and there are no crowds. It is a place remote from the busy parts of town and from the amusements—the theatre, the gardens, the taverns, the coffee-houses—yet for such an one as this poor woman, who wanted, above all things, rest and peace and freedom from anxiety about the morrow, no better lodgings could be found.

Isabel, in her pity for so much misery and in her self-reproach, spared nothing that could restore comfort to this luckless pair.

She bought a complete wardrobe at a second-hand or broker's shop—one suited for the wife of a respectable tradesman, and another suitable for her daughter. The girl looked on in a kind of stupid amazement. She had been so miserable in the morning; she had been so ragged; she had been so hopeless, so hungry, so despairing of the future; and now—now—she had been refreshed by good solid food, with a cup of wine, warming and comforting; she felt the comfort of a sufficient meal; she knew not what was going to happen, but she was bringing home two stout bundles containing frocks, petticoats, boots, stockings, and everything else; and lodgings were taken,

whither her mother was to be removed. What it meant, why this lady had come to their assistance, the girl neither asked nor felt the least curiosity to know.

In a word, Isabel opened her bundle and dressed the poor woman as she had not been dressed for three years. Then she left a message for the landlord concerning the rent that was owing; she guided the poor woman's footsteps down the rickety stairs; she placed her, with the girl, in her coach, and she carried her to the new lodgings.

'You like the room? You will be comfortable here?'

'Madam, it is a heaven. Are we dreaming? Am I awake?'

'If you like the place, well and good. Now, I will arrange for your rent to be paid by my attorney. And, as it is of no use to have a lodging and no food, I will arrange for you to have a guinea a week. That should suffice.'

'Madam!'

'Debts must be paid,' she said. 'Sooner or later debts must be paid'—but they neither heard nor understood.

'What about your husband?'

'He will want to take all the money for drinking.'

'Don't give him more than ninepence a day for his dinner and his drink. Let him not know how much you have. If he is troublesome, let my attorney know.' She turned and looked at the daughter. 'What can you do?' she asked.

'I can do plain work.'

'Humph! So can everybody. Anything else? Can you read and write?'

'Madam,' said her mother, 'she can read as well as any

clerk, and can write like a scrivener. She can play the harpsichord. She can sing, when she is not hungry, like a skylark.'

'Have you any wish or design for her?'

'Alas, madam! what can I do for her? There are girls wanted for the Pawns of the Royal Exchange, and for coffee-houses, and for Westminster Hall, where they sell gloves and lawyers' bands; but to get a place there wants interest, and there are temptations in those places. Yet a poor girl cannot escape temptation.'

'True——'

Then Isabel bethought her of something not belonging to the life of a girl behind a counter. It was quite a sudden thought. It had never occurred to her before. But, she thought, how if she had this girl in her own house, as a companion and a secretary, or what not? She looked again at the girl; in her new dress she was pleasing; her bearing was modest; she was delicate and lovely to look upon. Isabel liked people as well as things around her to be beautiful. The girl seemed honest and good-tempered.

'What is her name?' Isabel asked.

'She was christened Alice.'

'Alice . . . yes . . . what do you think, Alice? Would you like to come with me?'

Alice looked at her mother.

'I could teach her,' Isabel addressed the mother, 'very quickly the manners of the world. She is personable; her figure is good; I will take her into my household for a time—not as a servant, but as a secretary and companion. She could do for me the small services that I require.'

'Yes, madam—but—I fear——'

‘You are right to fear. I live in St. James’s Square, which is a respectable place. I am a widow, and I am wealthy. I have taken a fancy to this daughter of yours. Besides, there are other considerations.’ Again they understood nothing. ‘What do you say, Alice?’

‘Oh, madam, you overwhelm us!’ Alice fell upon her knees and kissed Isabel’s hand. ‘Who would have thought this morning——’

‘That such an accident would happen? Not I, for one.’

‘You have saved my mother’s life, madam. What can I say, except that I am truly grateful and should be happy indeed to be your servant.’

‘You will let her come to me?’ she asked the mother.

‘Madam, no angel of the Lord could be so good as you have been!’ She looked wistfully and searchingly at her benefactress. ‘But it is a wicked world. God deal with you, madam, as you deal with my daughter.’

‘Amen,’ Isabel replied seriously. She laid her hand on the woman’s shoulder. ‘Be not alarmed. I mean well by her. Meantime she shall visit you as often as you wish—every day if you like. And now there is nothing more, I believe. My attorney shall pay your rent and give you your allowance. And so I wish you a speedy recovery to health and strength; you look better already. I shall hope to see you again before long. Now farewell. Alice, you can come with me.’

Said Mrs. Brymer to her forewoman as the coach drove off:

‘The girl will do her a mischief.’

‘The girl seems well-behaved enough and well enough.’

‘You don’t know what I know. Well, I sometimes

think that if these poor girls could sell their figures as they sell their hair, how much we could improve some of our customers. Not Mrs. Weyland; her figure sets off any dress—her figure and her face. Well, we shall see. My opinion is that the girl will do Mrs. Weyland a mischief. Oh, I know what I know—a mischief!’

CHAPTER X

FOR ATONEMENT

FOR the first few days at the house in St. James's Square, Alice, strange, uncertain, and ill at ease, followed her patron about with wondering looks, not understanding what this transformation might mean. To Isabel she seemed always on the point of asking, 'Who are you? Why do you do it? What are those debts that you mentioned? To whom should they be paid?' These were the whispers of an unquiet conscience. The girl knew nothing about any debts that had to be paid, nor had she ever been taught to connect her father's troubles with the name of Mrs. Weyland. In the domestic circle the father, if he assumed any character at all, preferred that of Fate's football, and accused nobody except in vague terms, as part of a malignant world.

The stately house frightened the girl at first, unaccustomed to the accompaniments of wealth; the lackeys in their livery were objects of awe to her; the glass coach with the coachman bewigged and powdered on his hammer-cloth behind the four horses terrified her; the ceremonies of the dinner-table, with the footmen who waited, at the outset made her awkward and ill at ease; the company at the table was very far from that to which she had been accustomed. To sit beside a noble lord with his

sash and star seemed at first mere presumption. To give an order to a servant, for a girl who had never seen a servant before, seemed at first a kind of insolence. Time and custom quickly brought their remedy for this strangeness. Before many days she was accustomed to everything. The grandeur no longer overpowered her ; she perceived that servants expected to receive orders, and were paid for obeying them ; she found the noble lord a peevish and discontented creature who grew every day more peevish as the month went on and his money vanished. She had nothing to do with the state and ceremony of the daily life except to form part of it and to look on in silence, just as on the stage there are characters who are dressed up and grouped and fall into their places so as to make the moving pictures which are the chief charm of the stage, but have no part in the action or the dialogue.

Time did more than find a remedy for awkwardness and strangeness ; Time brought delight in this new life. What young girl but would rejoice, after dire penury, in freedom from anxiety with regard to food ; in things pleasant to look upon ; in the luxury of a large and well-furnished room ; in beautiful dress ? Isabel gave the girl such frocks as had before been considered unattainable, or even beyond the dreams of possibility. Poor girls have very early to limit their desires and their dreams in the way of dress.

The whole of the life was new to her. It was a new thing to walk in the Park and to see the beaux and the fine ladies ; comfort, luxury, freedom from care, sufficiency of everything—all were new to her. Above all—for the girl was grateful and loyal—there was the uncalled-for affection, the unfailing kindness with which she was treated by Isabel. There was the relief unspeakable of

being free from her drunken father : was it possible for her to regret or to lament the absence of that father, with his half-drunken mornings and his wholly drunken evenings? All these things together made her like unto one who moves in a dream.

Shakespeare represents the drunken tinker changed into a gentleman suddenly in his sleep ; I could wish that he had carried that transformation through the entire play, making him the principal actor and the hero of the piece, not a mere spectator. Alice was transformed from a beggar-girl, not, it is true, into a gentlewoman, but into that which is next best—the chosen protégée, the dependent, the humble companion, of a gentlewoman : not in a dream, but while broad awake. The witch of St. James's Square appeared upon the scene, like the fairy in the story of Cinderella ; then the girl's poor duds and rags fell from her, as if the fairy had touched them with her wand. She emerged habited like a young woman of respectability and consideration. Her mother's squalid lodging suddenly vanished, and was transformed into a home well furnished, well situated, fit for a respectable citizen's wife, not for the family of a starving bankrupt. Chill Penury fled shrieking ; the girl herself was driven away—still like Cinderella—in a coach-and-four to that part of the town where there is no poverty, no terror of the next day, no starvation, no awful dread of what the Fates may have in store, but in their place a constant cheerfulness, interrupted only by the minor troubles of life, such as toothache, headache, other aches, and the ills which afflict humanity in every rank of life. Would the transformation last ? Why should it last ? Alice asked herself from time to time, but less frequently as time went on. Why had it begun ? What did it mean ?

‘Child,’ said Isabel, watching her, ‘when will you forget the past? I see the memory in your eyes; things are not going to vanish; this is not Fairyland, nor is it a land of dreams. Think that the days of misery are gone; you shall have no more suffering, you and your mother, if I can hinder it. What does your mother say? She is reconciled to your stay with me?’

‘She cannot believe her own happiness. Oh, madam, she will now live! She has already become strong again. Good food and relief from anxiety have made her well.’

‘And your father—will he, too, assume a new character?’

‘Except for father,’ said Alice, ‘mother would have no trouble left at all. Except,’ she repeated, with a deep sigh, ‘for father.’

‘But why except him? Does he ill-treat her?’

‘I suppose not, unless you call drunkenness ill-treatment; but I do. I think that for a man to get drunk every day is terrible ill-treatment to his wife. Since she has been more comfortable he has become more drunken, mother tells me, than ever before. She gives him just what you recommended every morning, but he goes about among his old friends in the taverns just the same. To get rid of his constant importunity they give him drink.’

‘Does your father ask where the money comes from?’

‘No. It drops from heaven, he thinks—as indeed, madam, it does. He makes no inquiries. He only takes what is given. After a little he will try to sell some of my mother’s dresses for more drink. But she is stronger than she was, and she will stand up to him.’

‘Does he not ask after you?’

‘Madam, if he were to hear that I was dead and buried, he would not ask how, or where, or why, provided the

drink was not stopped. Drink has destroyed his natural affections; so long as he can get drink he cares not how he gets it, or who pays for it, or what becomes of his wife and daughter.'

'My dear,' said Isabel, 'it is a terrible thing for you that your father has become—such as he is. "Honour thy father"—how can you honour him?'

'Madam, I have been taught the true way of keeping that commandment by my mother. So long as I can remember anything, father has been drinking. Mother says that I must honour him as he ought to be, not as he is. I do not know him, she says, as he ought to be, but only as he is. And, of course, no one can honour him as he is. Honour him? Why, it is more than can be expected of me to forgive him.'

'As he ought to be? Yes. But how do you know what he ought to be?'

'Mother is pious, and well skilled in Holy Writ. She was the daughter of a country clergyman, who had books and encouraged her to read. She says that the Lord has given to every man his own separate mind as well as his own separate face; no two men are alike in mind or in face. Every man may ruin his face by an evil life, and he can also disfigure and distort his mind in the same way, if we could only understand it.'

'I see, child. Go on. Alas for the distortions of mind as well as face!'

'She remembers him as he was—a young man, sprightly and comely, eager for work and full of hope; a young man who intended to become a Common Council man, and thought that with good luck and hard work he might become Alderman of his ward, and even Lord Mayor of London. This is the man she loved and loves still—not

the man whose face is covered with red spots, and his nose swollen with drink ; not the poor man who falls on the stairs and reels about the room, and drinks small ale in the morning before he can even speak. I am to think of him as mother first knew him, and then, she says, I can pray for his restoration, and thank God for giving me a father with so many great gifts and qualities.'

That afternoon they walked together in the Park ; the place was filled with fine people, all well dressed and well mannered. The money-grubbers and traders were in the City, picking up the gold ; the lawyers were at Westminster, in their chambers. The crowd consisted entirely of the better sort—the gentlefolk, with a sprinkling of officers ; they were the people of fashion ; they were all smiling, laughing, saying pretty things, dangling canes, offering snuff-boxes, handling fans, talking scandal of each other as they passed and repassed ; there did not seem to be among them all one single thought of care, trouble, sorrow, sickness, disease, poverty, old age, death, repentance or remorse. The whole world was there, and the whole world was happy.

'I could not believe,' said Alice timidly, 'that there were so many happy people in London. Yet there are so many poor creatures——'

'My child, do not mistake. We are all sham and pretence ; there is no real happiness anywhere. We all want what we cannot get ; like the child, we cry for the moon.'

'Oh, but see how happy they look !'

'This morning, Alice, you were telling me what your mother says about the distorted face and the distorted mind. Let us look for the face and read the mind, not as it should be, because, my dear, no one but the owner—

or his wife—knows what that ought to be—but as it is——’

So she began reading the faces as they passed.

‘Here is a man with a face like an ape. See how he grins. Fie, what a distorted face! That is because he has spent his whole life in making love and deceiving girls. I don’t know what his face should be like, but you see what he has made it. Here comes a face that hath a vulture-like appearance. Vultures, you know, feed on carrion. He is one who lives by betting and gaming. That is, he picks up ignorant young gentlemen and strips them of all that they have. Pah! his very breath is corruption. Here is a lady whose face reminds one of a snake, the crawling, creeping thing who bites the hand of her benefactor. Oh, my dear, there is indeed very little happiness in the Park to-day!’

She sighed and turned the discourse.

‘What does a young girl like you want to know of the world’s sins? Let us keep you in ignorance for your own happiness. Tell me, child—you began to speak of your father and of his face distorted. Alas! there is no animal whom he can resemble, because no animal drinks. He must have ruined his face without making it like the face of any other creature made by the Lord.’

‘There are the baser creatures,’ said Alice, with the bitterness with which she always spoke and thought of her father—‘snakes and lizards, frogs and toads, earwigs and wasps, rats and mice: among them all there must be some whom he resembles.’

‘Perhaps. But I know of none. You should show him a little more pity.’

‘I cannot, madam—I cannot. He has made my mother suffer too much.’

‘Your mother, Alice, is a wise and a good woman. I must have discourse with her. Touching the ruined mind as well as the ruined face, Lord! if all the world were virtuous, how gallant would be the men and how lovely would be the women!’

‘Dear madam’—Alice touched her hand in a pretty, modest way—‘if you look into the glass you will see the unspoiled face.’

It was rank flattery! But could the girl help thinking that in her patron’s face there lay confessed all the virtues?

‘Does he never talk to you concerning his bankruptcy?’

‘He never talks to me at all.’

‘Does he never curse the—the cause of his bankruptcy?’

‘Indeed, madam, I know not how he can, seeing that he was himself the cause of that misfortune.’

‘I thought I had heard something of a—what do you call her?—one who defrauds creditors.’

‘Alas, madam! it was not a debtor that destroyed him; it was the tavern—always the tavern and the drink. What need to speak of what my mother knows only too well—of what has pulled him down and keeps him down?’

By a thousand arts Isabel set herself to win the girl’s confidence and affection as well as her gratitude—the latter being of much less importance. She found that Alice was fond of reading. She bought books—whole shelves of books—poetry and essays and history and travel, not forgetting books of pious meditation. She sent books to Alice’s mother, she encouraged Alice to read aloud in the quiet afternoons, when there are no carriage-wheels in St. James’s Square, and only the plashing of the water in the fountain.

Then she found that the girl was fond of music, and

could play a little on the harpsichord, having been taught by her mother before disaster came into her life. She was out of practice, but she had a light and dainty touch. Isabel sent for a teacher of music, and caused her to practise every day for two hours at least, so that she soon returned to her former proficiency, which was not, indeed, that of a musician by profession, but was yet of a kind not often found among young women, who are too much given to be contented and satisfied when they can play a country dance, such as 'Barley Break' or 'Johnny, Come Kiss Me Now.'

It was, however, in singing that Alice chiefly excelled. Her voice, a strong voice of great compass, clear, and full, was uncultivated. Isabel discovered this gift and power by accident—hearing the girl sing to herself, all out of the joy of her heart, in her own room. She sent for a singing-master, who came every day and gave Alice lessons.

Then the quiet house became transformed. It cannot be pretended that the houses of St. James's Square, which are solid and substantial, are cheerful of aspect. They were built for people wealthy and of rank, who are mostly, it must be confessed, somewhat dull in conversation, sticklers for things old, impatient of new ideas, and standing mightily on their dignity. Mostly, they are silent and somewhat gloomy.

The hall-porter sits in his great hooded chair; the lackeys wait about in the hall; outside, the chairmen wait and talk in low voices; the rooms are quiet; the stairs are quiet; a heavy stillness lingers in the air; if there are voices, they come from the kitchens below, and are only audible when certain doors are thrown open. The houses, in a word, by their appearance, by their silence, proclaim themselves the abode of the Great.

And then this house, Isabel's house, alone in the

square, became transformed. All the morning through the open window was heard the music of the harpsichord, rising, falling, swelling, sinking, tinkling, now in solemn, now in cheerful strains ; now celebrating a Papistical Mass, now playing a Protestant hymn, now thundering a Tyrtæan exhortation to war, now softly singing the delights of peace, now making love, now welcoming the newly-born, and now mourning for the dead. Through those open windows in the summer mornings all the emotions of humanity were portrayed by the musician as if by a painter. But the painter catches one emotion only, and fixes it upon his canvas ; the musician represents all, one after the other, as they fly across the brain, catches them all, reproduces them all, fixes them all. It is strange how one young girl can show the working of all passions, all emotions, all hope, all love, all regret. She plays the music set down for her ; she, too, like her audience, as she plays, feels those emotions. Yet she does not create them ; she plays what she is told to play.

When Alice played the stolid hall-porter sat motionless, his wand of office in his hand, and the whispering lackeys were still, and the chairmen sat upon the doorsteps listening, and doors were thrown open, so that even in the kitchen, while the choleric cook broke the eggs to make his omelette, the music floated down the stairs, and, like the lapping of the waves on a fine summer day upon a beach of rolling shingle, musical and restful, played about the ears of dairymaids and scullions, as open to emotion as their mistress.

When the harpsichord ceased the skylark began. Then the sweet, strong voice rose and fell, filling all the chambers, not only the chambers of the house, but the chambers of the mind, the chambers of imagery. The housemaid in

the bedroom sat down and threw her apron over her face, so as to shut out the present and to live in imagination for a few brief moments. There came visions to the young and dreams to the old : to the country girl, visions of stream and meadow, wood and garden, Corydon and Alexis ; to the country man, ecstatic dreams of Poll and Moll, and Dorothy Draggletail and Kitty, who was a charming maid and carried the milking-pail. Outside, in the square, my Lord the Secretary, my Lord of the Treasury, heard the voice as he stood upon his doorstep before getting into his chair. He listened. Higher and higher soared the voice ; it pierced the clouds, it mounted to the sky. Heaven ! how poor, how small, how trifling, were the intrigues of the French King and the Spanish statesman compared with the vast human interests awakened by that voice and by that singing !

Isabel's first care was so to distract the girl's mind and to fill it with new thoughts as to drive out the memory of the past. Thus, she not only gave her these lessons in music and singing, but she awakened in her and cultivated the feminine instinctive love of fine things. An essayist once wrote a paper—you will not find it in the *Tatler* or the *Spectator*—in which he argued and proved that the love for finery, which men are too apt to ridicule in women, is the foundation of all art, of all sense of beauty, of all endeavours after loveliness. The woman desires to be beautiful above all things ; not only because she thereby pleases and attracts men (and enrages her rivals), but because she loves things beautiful ; therefore she loves colour, and a soft silk or a pretty ribbon pleases her beyond measure, and the sparkle of light in precious stones, and the colour of gold ; also she surrounds herself with things which she believes to be lovely, such

as china jars and monsters, gilt furniture, pictures, curtains, and so forth. In a word, the Magister Artium, the Master of Arts, is a woman, not a man. When man is left to himself, a sanded floor and a wooden settle are enough for him, and so that he has drink enough he cares not whether it is served in a pewter tankard or a mazer of silver-gilt.

Isabel concerned herself very little about the origin and meaning of woman's taste for finery ; it was enough for her to give Alice everything that she liked and desired to make her love the world, and rejoice in her youth and beauty, and forget the dreadful past. She watched with satisfaction how the blossoms closed up by the cruel frost of penury began to expand in the soft warmth of affection ; she ministered gladly to the awakened taste for dress and finery ; she rejoiced to observe how the numbing influence of poverty dropped from her like his ragged cloak from a beggar.

It was next her design to impart to the girl the manners and ideas of the wealthy.

‘ I will make Alice,’ she said, always striving after atonement, ‘ an heiress. She shall have a marriage portion, and that a rich one. She must be qualified to take her place in the world.’

Manners, of a kind, would seem to be more easily learned by a woman than by a man. That is not, however, the case. It is held by those who have pedigrees that it takes three generations to convert a bourgeoisie into a gentlewoman. A man may become a gentleman in the second generation, because he is always and all day long with other men, and is rubbing off his ill breeding every hour at the tavern, the club, or the coffee-house. But a woman sits for the most part alone ; she has few oppor-

tunities of learning manners and the gentlewoman's ways of thought and language. In the case of Alice there was a certain air of refinement to begin with; it was inherited from her mother, the daughter of the scholar, not from her father, the Ludgate Hill mercer. This natural inclination helped her; in a short time Alice had acquired all the external manners and attractions which her patron could teach her, while of the ideas which should rule her newly-acquired station she daily learned more.

This was Isabel's Act of Atonement. Yes, it began with that object; but it was affection which caused her to keep the girl and to lavish gifts of all kinds upon her.

'Debts,' she had said at first, 'must be paid.'

There are some debts the payment of which seems only to make the original debt seem larger. So every day, as the girl increased in grace and in worth, the Act of Atonement became more necessary, the debt to be paid grew larger and larger. Is it, then, the way of wrong-doing that nothing can repay, nothing can atone? If so, then Heaven help us all, for even if the injury be forgiven, how shall we forgive ourselves?

CHAPTER XI

LOVE ENTERS

THIS Act of Atonement was by no means the brief and transient whim of a fine lady, nor a mere passing fit of remorse for a sin long since committed and almost forgotten. Isabel intended to make the whole future of the girl her special care. How best to train the girl for a position of ease and consideration—such as she designed for Alice—occupied at this time nearly all Isabel's thoughts. You have seen how she gave her dresses, gave her accomplishments, taught her manners, encouraged her in the cultivation of her abilities, and accustomed her to a mode of life for which she had not been born, and which she had never considered possible. To throw aside the girl after so much had been done for her would have been a worse wickedness than that for which she was endeavouring to atone.

She added, therefore, the life of the world to the domestic life. She carried the girl about the town with her. She took her to the shops in Cheapside, where the choicest treasures were brought out from their boxes and unwrapped, for the view of leaders of fashion only who could afford to pay for them. Is there any greater pleasure for a woman than to behold, to handle, to feel, to enjoy in imagination, the lovely things which the

merciers and the drapers keep only for their richer customers? You think that to go a-shopping is not part of a woman's education? Isabel was a woman, and she thought otherwise. I have told you also how Isabel carried the girl into the Park and showed her the world of fashion. She did not take her to the Assembly and the Card-room, just because Alice did not belong—and never would belong—to the company of those places—a company who, like the lilies of the field, neither toil nor spin—nor did she possess one silver sixpence with which to tempt Fortune at the green table. Nor, again, did Isabel take her to the masquerade, because the scenes of license, the mad merriment, the dress of many of the ladies, the conversation, the behaviour of the young men, were not such as a young girl of virtuous and sober conversation should witness or share. She took Alice, however, to the theatre. It may be questioned whether the stage offers desirable teaching and examples to the young. If the stage in the least represented real life, it would not be a place for a girl. But the stage has now been purged of its old freedoms; it is no longer a place for the utterance of language not to be tolerated in a polite world. And yet it offers to the spectators the sight of a world not resembling in any other particular than that of dress the world of men and women. It shows a world in which religion has no part; a world in which everybody remains always at the same age, whether they are young or old; a world without morals and without moral law; a world without fear or remorse or principles. It is a charming world, to tell the truth, but there is no one so young and so inexperienced as to take it for the true world; even the actresses do not believe it, though, if report is true, they sometimes behave as if they do.

‘You will see, my dear,’ said Isabel, ‘Belinda and Clarissa behaving in the most extraordinary manner; but you will not be tempted to imitate them—no one ever takes them seriously—and, to tell the truth, they are the most delightful, the most charming, the most witty, pretty, sweet and obliging creatures on the stage that it is possible to imagine. Off the stage, I believe that they are sometimes stupid, like the rest of us, sometimes selfish, and sometimes wicked. That is their concern, not ours. You will find in Bellamour, Belmont, and Foppington men to match the women; but you will not expect to meet them off the stage. No one imitates them, and you will be infinitely diverted with the humours of the company—the fine ladies in the boxes; the gallants in the pit (in airs and graces they surpass the women); the gods in the gallery; the impudent orange-girls; the noisy footmen; the joy of the people.’

Or, in the summer evenings of August and September, when the sun goes down at seven or earlier, but the day is still warm and the air soft, they would go out upon the river, sometimes alone, sometimes with Oliver, and be rowed gently up and down the stream. At such a time the broad river—it is as broad above Westminster as below London Bridge—seems to carry down from the meadows above a fragrance peculiar to the season, made up of late hay, clover, and apple-orchards. On such evenings the moonbeams may lie in broad strips of white light; the belated swans float beside the banks; and on the stream parties of people are out in boats of all kinds—wherries, tilt-boats, pleasure-barges—some with fiddles, some with horns and flutes, some with no other music than the soft voices of the girls. One boat calls to another; the people drink to each other’s health and joy; the oars

dip softly, and the water laps above the bows as the boats pass each other. On either bank the trees stand like ghosts in their dim outline; the barges with their brown sails are spectral in the twilight; the lights from the boats are like stars; everything, except the boat itself, is ghostly, sweet, and heavenly.

On such evenings, in such a boat, as they floated along, the voices of the two, Oliver and Alice, would join together in one of Purcell's or Arne's duets and melodies; as their voices lifted and fell, the voices from the other boats were hushed to listen. Then would the girl's voice break down, not for sorrow, but for the brimming-over cup of pleasure and of sweetness; would catch suddenly and break into a sob, and her eyes would fill with tears. Isabel, who understood all the moods and every emotion of the girl's heart, which was like a delicate harp, so that it responded to every gentle breath, soothed her without a word, but with a touch of her hand.

Or, still with Oliver as escort, they would pass the evening at Vauxhall or Marylebone. Can one ever forget the first visit to those entertaining gardens, with the coloured lights hanging in festoons among the trees, while the company wander along the paths; listen to the music and the singing, watch the dancers, and sit in the alcoves over the supper of cold chicken and the bottle of Lisbon? Can one ever forget the first joy of mixing with a company so gay, so happy, so full of joy and laughter and merriment? Alas! it is but for the first time; when one goes again the laughter is not so free, the happiness is not so universal, and one can see, as at a theatre, behind the scenes. But always it is a pleasure to hear this music and to watch those coloured lamps; always there is some illusion in the sight of a great crowd, all trying to look

happy even though they are hiding all kinds of sorrows and of pains.

In this censorious and suspicious world it is not wonderful that neither the girl nor her patron could escape criticism. Who was this companion? To begin with, she was lovely; in the second place, she was well dressed; in the third place, she was well mannered; in the fourth, she gave no cause for scandal by whispering in corners, by looks, or by words. Some said that she was a sister of the fair widow (whom she did not in the least resemble); others, that she was a cousin from Hackney, a suburb on the other side of London, much frequented by Nonconformists, to whom Mrs. Weyland belonged by birth; others, that she was a country girl brought up for the entertainment of Mrs. Weyland, and in the hope of bringing people to the house—a very silly piece of gossip; others, that she was an actress in training, who would before long make her first appearance at the Garden or the Lane; others, that she was a singer whom Mrs. Weyland was educating for Vauxhall, and that she would soon appear as Mlle. Squallini in the orchestra of that Garden.

It is the most remarkable fact about scandal that, although it is believed to strip a woman of her reputation, and to leave her, as the saying is, without a rag, it really does her no harm at all. Isabel was well known to be the daughter of a merchant. Women of quality whispered the fact to each other behind their fans; murmured it in church; laughed over it in private; yet it made no difference whatever in their behaviour towards her. She was accused of introducing to society an adventuress, an actress—what you will—but it made no difference. In the same way Alice herself, who sang so sweetly, looked so lovely, and behaved so modestly, was said to be little better than she ought to

be—again to use the homely figure of speech—but it made no difference. In the drawing-room the people behaved to her with as much politeness as if she was the daughter of a Countess and the betrothed of an Earl.

In what follows we ought not to blame Oliver on the score of ingratitude, nor ought we to accuse him of inconstancy. Gratitude does not demand love; gratitude excludes love because love admits no authority or sovereign rights on the part of a mistress. The last thing that Oliver would have suspected was that madam would regard him with eyes of affection; the last thing that he would have ventured upon was the interruption of a friendship, based upon the most profound gratitude, on the chance of an exchange for a tie still closer. Isabel's age was very nearly his own; she was a year or two older, a difference which mattered nothing; but she was rich and he was poor; she was so rich that she might marry a man of any rank; he was still so poor that he could not marry at all; she had everything provided for her—station, condition, consideration, and wealth; he had nothing but ambition and hope. He was, perhaps, dull-witted not to understand that the lady of the house was making more than a friend of him, but remember the distance between them, and remember the respect with which he regarded her.

On the other hand there was the girl Alice—Isabel's companion. She was at the most attractive age of a lovely woman—namely, in the first flush of her beauty, the very heyday of spring. If Isabel stood for July, Alice stood for May. On her cheek of velvet lay the bloom of the peach or the plum; in her soft blue eyes there lay always the light of love; about her as she moved was a surrounding cloud which glowed with sunshine and

turned her into a goddess—even into Venus herself. If she sang, it was as one of the Divine Muses ; if she talked, it was Minerva ; if she commanded, it was Juno. Such talk, such thoughts, belong to a lover. In one word, Oliver was her lover. He fell in love with her at first sight ; he saw perfection in her from the very beginning ; and as the days followed each other the thought of her perfection occupied him more and more. His chambers were haunted by the ghost of this girl ; her face came to him in dreams ; her voice rang in his brain—why go on ? Oliver was in love. Oliver was young. Oliver worshipped his mistress as only the young can worship the young.

Love has its stages and its steps. People used to draw maps of love as an island, plans of love as a fortress, pictures of love as a flower. The beginnings are the same, whether we speak of a voyage, or a siege, or a garden enclosed. The young man begins with admiration ; he seeks again the object of his admiration ; he discovers new and unsuspected charms ; he looks around with jealous eyes—there is no other rival in sight ; he sets himself to watch for the appearance of a rival ; he pays his court in a thousand little ways ; but as yet he speaks not—he is silent. It is in the hush of the early morning before the sun rises, when Nature awakes from the night, and the birds begin to look about and to clear their throats ; there is a short time of expectancy, and then the word is spoken. It is a word which the maiden awaits ; she feels it coming. She longs to hear it spoken, but she is afraid.

Alice—to whom love-making was a thing not known either by experience, or by discourse, or by reading, except in those fiery forms adopted by poets, who present all the emotions with extravagance—received these attentions unmoved. Mr. Macnamara was kind to her—as kind in his

way as Isabel. He found her music and songs ; he played with her and sang with her ; he was so good as to do all kinds of little things for her—those little things which women like to have done for them. In her innocence she suspected nothing and she knew nothing. Nay, she was of humble mind ; she could not forget her father—the man of thirst, the bankrupt, the man who could do nothing except drink and rail at Fortune. She would have been ashamed for Oliver even to see him, and more ashamed still for him to find out that he was her father. How should she, being such as she was, enter into the family of a gentleman such as Mr. Macnamara ? But the question, if it entered into her head, remained unanswered.

The most dangerous pursuit for two young persons—being man and maid—is the practice together of music, whether of singing or of playing, or both. In the second or third stage of this episode of love, Oliver spent all the evenings which he could spare from his work at the house in St. James's Square. As a rule these evenings were spent over the music. Sometimes Isabel was present with them, sometimes she was out. Now, to look over the same book of music, to lay heads together over the same song, is to tempt a lover beyond his power of resistance. One slight movement, and the distance between the two faces disappears ; the least turn of the head, and lip meets lip, and all is said and done ; the island of love is found, the fortress surrenders, the rose is gathered.

This happened to Oliver ; he stood beside the girl, bending over the music which she was playing on the harpsichord ; their heads were close together ; she asked him a question ; she turned her face innocently—there was not the least touch of the coquette in Alice—up to his ; her eyes met his ; there was no love or anticipation of love

in those eyes, only trust and confidence in a friend ; it was a commonplace question which she had to ask ; there was nothing uncommon in the question or in the answer which it demanded ; but at the meeting of her eyes Oliver's became clouded : his cheek flamed, his pulse quickened, he trembled in every limb, he stooped a little lower, he turned his head, he kissed the girl.

‘ Alice,’ he murmured—‘ ah, Alice, I love you !’

She sprang to her feet with a cry of terror. It was not the surprise of love ; it was not the startled cry of the maiden who is frightened by the first show or appearance of love ; it was a cry of terror.

‘ You, Mr. Macnamara ? Oh, no, no, no !’

‘ Yes, yes, yes, Alice—yes ! It is none other. Why not ? Shall I tell you again ’—he tried to take her hand—‘ that I love you—love you—love you, Alice ?’

‘ Sir ! Mr. Macnamara !’

‘ Call me Oliver.’

‘ Sir ! Mr. Macnamara !’ she repeated. ‘ Oh, you must not ! Is it possible that you do not understand ?’

‘ What is there to understand ? That I love you—that I love you, Alice ; that is all I want to understand.’

‘ Oh, he is blind, he is deaf ! Sir, how shall I explain ? What am I to say ?’

‘ Say nothing, Alice. Let me say over and over again that——’

‘ Sir, you do not know. I am a poor and very humble girl. It is not proper that such a gentleman as yourself should offer to make me your wife. You must look higher—oh, much higher. You may marry where you please ; you may marry a rich gentlewoman. It would be easy to find one who would love you in return——’

‘ I want no rich gentlewoman. I want you, Alice.’

Again he pressed forward to take her hand.

‘Sir, it is impossible. My father is a bankrupt draper, nothing more. He is not a good man. I could not ask a gentleman to accept him as a father-in-law. He drinks all day ; he will do no work.’

‘Alice, what do I care about your father? It is you that I love, not your father at all.’

‘Sir, once for all’—she folded her hands and faced him steadily and with resolution—‘once for all, sir, there must be an end. I forbid you ever again to mention this subject. If you do, I shall appeal to madam for protection. Let me go, sir!’

With these brave words she rushed from the room, banging the door after her, and ran to her own room, where she sat down and burst into tears. The reason of these tears is not, perhaps, apparent to every reader. Oliver, left alone, stood staring stupidly at the closed door. What did she mean? Why this wrath? Why should she refuse his most honourable advances?

‘Alice, my child,’ said Isabel some days later, ‘what is the matter with you? Are you ill? Have you a headache? Are you working too hard?’

‘No, madam ; I am very well.’

‘You don’t look very well. I must have the doctor or the herb-woman to see you if you do not improve. You have not quarrelled with Oliver, have you?’

‘N—no, madam.’

‘You have not played with him or sung with him for nearly a week. Last night you sat beside me, leaving him to play and sing by himself. We must not have moods, my dear. If Oliver has said anything to offend you, I am quite sure that he did not mean it as an offence.’

‘No, madam, he has meant no offence.’

‘Well, my dear, he will be here to-morrow. Play and sing with him as usual.’

She obeyed. The former relations were renewed, but with a certain constraint. Alice would not remain with him alone. And Oliver, for his part, wondered what was meant, and could only hope that it was startled maidenly modesty. Isabel, for her part, suspected nothing.

From time to time, however, she remembered the warning words of Mrs. Brymer. ‘The girl,’ the dressmaker had said, ‘will do you a mischief, madam; for sure and certain you will bring a mischief upon your own head, and through this girl.’

Every woman is a witch; every other woman knows it; therefore every woman can foretell the future, though some are not so far-sighted as others. There are diversities in gifts; some women do not cultivate the power of prescience; some despise the power because they think only of themselves, and women are seers only as concerns others. But whenever Isabel remembered these words they gave her a pang, a sense of evil to come, a fear, a passing uneasiness. Yet she put the fear aside. How could this girl, who loved her, do her a mischief? It was impossible. Yet mischief may be done even by those who are all unconscious of evil, either in thought or in deed.

No one, certainly, who did not know the truth—Isabel alone knew it—after a time would have believed that the girl was the daughter of a drunken, degraded wretch such as her father; no one would have believed that she had gone through so long and so terrible a time of privation and anxiety; that she had ever been dressed in rags; that she had lived in misery among thieves and drabs; that she had been tortured by privation and pinched with hunger.

Now, her cheek was touched once more with the dainty bloom of youth—nay, with such a bloom as it had never before known. Her beauty was like that of a tender spring flower—a daffodil, a hyacinth—or like a rose in June; it was a joy to the eyes, it lifted the soul of those who were worthy to understand purity and sweetness. Her eyes no longer shone like lights of despair upon a pitiless world, her step was as light as the step of a mountain deer, her carriage as free as that of any wild creature of the wood. She carolled like a bird about the house, she ran after Isabel and anticipated all her wishes, she had become a willing servant—a slave to her patron. Nay, she even justified all that was done for her: she relieved Isabel of all care, she kept the household accounts, she became keeper of the wardrobe, she ruled and regulated the establishment.

Isabel, looking on, every day rejoiced with complacency over the thought of her Atonement.

‘Surely, surely,’ she said to herself, ‘the debt is paid. The mother is happy because the girl is happy, and because she is safe. As for the father, I did not lead him into drinking ways, and I cannot cure him. He owes his misfortunes to his own wickedness. He is in debt to himself. I cannot pay for him. Yet a little while and the man will be no more. What I do owe is what I shall pay, and am paying, to his wife and child.’

Atonements, however, of this kind are not always accepted, nor are they always effectual. And how could Alice do her an injury? What injury? She could not; it was impossible. Isabel looked in her frank eyes and saw that she was wholly to be trusted; the girl was honest through and through; all her thoughts were loyal, honest, grateful, and true; she seemed not even to know that she

was beautiful: the glances of the gallants in the theatre and the Park—be sure that wherever she went all eyes were turned to her—were thrown away: she had, indeed, no thought, except of affection, which began with gratitude; of duty, which also sprang out of gratitude; of gratitude itself, which needed no awakening; of the wish to do something in return for so much kindness; of the natural joy in the present moment which Isabel made so pleasant for her, and of the happiness of youth which had no unsatisfied desire and no longing for the moon or for anything else that is impossible.

‘The girl,’ said Mrs. Brymer, a prophetess like all her sex, ‘will do you a mischief. For sure, madam, she will do you a mischief.’

Isabel could not choose but remember the prophecy. It was absurd. What mischief could this girl—such a girl—do to her?

Yet the mischief was begun already; the poor child knew nothing of it, and suspected nothing. Yet the mischief was begun, and was actively working. You shall hear, in due course, what it was, of what kind, and how great and terrible.

CHAPTER XII

LORD STRATHERRICK ACTS

LORD STRATHERRICK in his lodgings—the lodgings provided for him by his sister-in-law—awoke in a singularly bad temper. He had spent the evening as usual, and with even worse luck than usual. This morning he rose in a villainous temper because he had lost steadily and without a gleam of good fortune, because it was still early in the month, and because he had written to Isabel a request for money and knew that he would be refused. It was a hot morning, too, and the air of the lodging was stifling and confined. He looked round the room and remembered the spacious apartments of his town house before the money-lenders had gotten their life interest in it, and he realized—a thing which happened every day—the depths of his fall. In his hand was his purse, nearly empty; the sight of it made him comprehend still more vividly the depths of his fall. One who has once been rich and lived in a noble house does not always trouble himself about vicissitudes of fortune, or he would go mad. Mostly he rubs along, eating and drinking, contented with the day's food and the day's drink, without remembering too much. But the loss of his fortune rises before him from time to time like a threatening and mocking spectre.

He sat in a loose gown with slippers on his feet and a

nightcap on his head ; before him was a tankard of ale, on which he made his breakfast. The room contained no books of any kind, nor anything by which a dull day might be got through. Lord Stratherrick had but one recreation, one occupation, one amusement. He would willingly have gambled all day and all night and always ; he would have looked forward to heaven itself—a place which such as he regard in its provisions for men of rank as but dull at best—with pleasure had it been furnished with a hazard-table.

Presently the door opened and Mr. Pinder appeared.

‘I beg your lordship’s pardon. May I have speech with your lordship?’

‘What do you mean, Pinder,’ he replied peevishly, ‘by interrupting? Can’t you see that I am just out of bed, and that I am engaged with my morning draught?’

‘I will look in again, my lord.’

‘No. Now you are here, stay. Pinder, I had the most infernal luck last night.’

‘Dear! dear!’ the ex-valet murmured softly. ‘I am sorry to hear it.’

‘You know the miserable allowance that my sister-in-law makes me. It is only the second week of the month. Pinder, I lost very nearly the whole of it last night.’

‘The whole of it! The whole of it! Dear me, ’tis sad! Perhaps her ladyship, Mrs. Weyland——’

‘You are a fool, Pinder. I have told you over and over again of her infernal stinginess. She will do nothing.’

‘If only your lordship had any security——’

‘Again, Pinder, you are a fool. Well, what do you want with me?’

‘I have come upon a business of more importance, my lord, than an evening’s run of luck.’

‘What can be more important than an empty purse? Where are your senses gone this morning?’

‘Much more important. If your lordship will give me your attention. It is important to understand the whole case. You know something of it already.’

‘What is essential?’

The ex-valet whispered—there was no need for lowering his voice, but some men think to show importance by a whisper :

‘I’ve got the draper—the man about whom I told your lordship—the man who was made bankrupt by the Honourable Mrs. Weyland, widow of your lordship’s brother, the Honourable Roland. He is in my house. I can bring him to your lordship in a few minutes.’

‘Oh, that person! We know his story. Besides, I’ve got no money to give him.’

‘I have told him that your lordship will give him neither money nor drink.’

‘I understood you to say that the man is a pauper.’

‘Your lordship had better see him. It is really important. I have made him promise to tell your lordship the whole history. I shall pay him—with a drink. He is always satisfied with a drink. He is of the kind who for a drink will do anything and say anything.’

‘I don’t know why I want to see the man,’ said his lordship peevishly.

‘If your lordship will not see him there is nothing more to be said. But you may prevent a terrible family scandal.’

‘Pinder, again you are a fool! I told you before that I care nothing about scandals. How many scandals have you known in my family? And am I one penny the worse? Have you not learned by this time that in our

rank we are not in the least injured by family scandals? It is the tradesman, the lawyer, the clergyman, the physician, who is injured by scandal. Poor devils! It kills them, I am told; it deprives them of clients and patients and customers; a family scandal crushes them. But as for us . . . why, Pinder, you ought to know—you really ought to know—after all those years with me.’

‘I beg your lordship’s pardon. I should have remembered. There have been a good many scandals in your lordship’s life. As you say, they have not hurt you. There was the scandal about the Lady . . .’

‘You need not begin to remember things. The lady has long since rejoined her family.’

‘To be sure. And there was the scandal about the faro-table——’

‘I say, Pinder, that you need not recall old stories.’

‘And the case of the young fellow who blew out his brains.’

‘A young fool! If he had only waited a day or two——’

‘As your lordship says, these family scandals do no harm to persons of your quality.’

Perhaps his lordship exaggerated the power of rank in making family scandals of none effect; certainly the family scandal of being ruined, of having raised money on everything—by the sale of pictures, books, plate, and furniture; by the cutting down of woods; by selling his life interest in estates—had been so favourably received by the world that his lordship had not a single friend left; that he was not received in any coffee-house or tavern frequented by his social equals; that he was no longer received in any club of gentlemen, and that no one in London was more universally shunned than himself. Yet

he declared that family scandals could do him no harm.

‘What can that shopkeeper fellow do?’ he asked. ‘What can he say? To whom can he say it?’

‘As your lordship says, he can do nothing. No family scandal could hurt the Honourable Mrs. Weyland. Her ladyship would not even be annoyed, I suppose. The man comes to my house; he is admitted because he is a cousin of a member of the company; he drinks; his tongue is loosened, and he talks.’

‘The story is talked about in your parlour—what does that matter?’

‘Oh, my lord!—pardon me. My parlour is nothing less than an Exchange for news of the nobility. My people—those who use my parlour—are not only valets; they are also footmen and coachmen: everything that is done is known to them. Do you suppose that a great lady can go anywhere or do anything without its being known to all her servants? I could tell you where one great lady goes twice a week, in the afternoon, and why she goes there. I can tell you where a noble lord keeps a bird in a cage, so to speak, without his lady-wife knowing anything about it. These things are talked about, I say, first in my parlour, where there is something new related every day—something surprising; your lordship would be astonished.’

‘Well, if the stories are confined to your parlour——’

‘They are not; they go from my parlour to the servants’ hall. There they are discussed in full, with additions. Some of my people have a very happy knack of making things out to seem more important than they are in reality; and, then—I beg your lordship’s attention to the point—while the gentlemen do not, as a rule, talk to

their valets—they treat them, for the most part, like dust beneath their feet—the ladies do talk to their ladies'-maids—oh yes!—they ask all the news, and the lady's-maid knows it all, and while she dresses her mistress she keeps her in good temper by telling her the newest scandal. Your lordship follows me?’

‘I think you are infernally long-winded! But go on.’

‘Very well. This draper will tell his story. Then it will fly abroad to every servants’ hall; it will be known there how the Honourable Mrs. Weyland got rid of her debts and liabilities by marrying a prisoner sentenced to death in Newgate. Then the lady’s-maid will tell her mistress, and all the world will know it.’

‘Well? And what if they do?’

‘As your lordship says, a family scandal cannot harm persons of your quality. Still, her ladyship would perhaps be better pleased if the thing could be kept secret.’

‘Perhaps—perhaps. Hark ye, Pinder. I can give the man no money, but it might be worth while to keep him quiet.’

‘I think so myself, my lord. That is why I am here this morning.’

‘How much will keep him quiet?’

‘He wants little or nothing but drink. Something has happened to him. An unexpected good fortune has come to him. He boasts that an old friend has placed his wife in a good and comfortable lodging and has given her an allowance. He himself takes all he can get out of that allowance, and sallies forth every morning to drink it, but when he has spent his day’s allowance he goes about and begs for more. He is no longer in rags, and he abstains from selling his new broadcloth because it is much easier

for one well-dressed to get a drink from an old friend than for one in rags. Now, my lord, all he wants is the run of the beer cellar, the wine-bins and the rum at the Grapes Tavern. I warrant to keep him quiet with that bribe.'

'Very good—do so.'

'I will. Meantime, my lord, I very well understand your lordship will make money out of this job.'

'I must arrange with my sister-in-law for the permanent silence of the man. Is he vindictive?'

'Very vindictive. Well, my lord, let us understand each other.'

'Ah!' his lordship looked up slowly, as if the thing mattered little. 'How much, Pinder?'

The man held out his hand.

'Halves, my lord.'

Lord Stratherrick sat up with a sudden show of wounded dignity.

'You forget your position, Pinder.'

'Not at all. I know my position. Your lordship will excuse me if I remind you of it. You have not a sixpence except what Mrs. Weyland gives you. Everybody knows that—the servants' hall discussed that a long time ago. The whole company in the Park know it. You are going to buy the silence of this man—that means that you will give him a small sum, and that you will obtain from her ladyship a large sum. I shall be able to find out—oh! the thing is quite easy—what you get for buying the man's silence and what you give. And if I were to give him, meantime, the run of my cellars, I must be paid for the drink, and I must go halves with your lordship for the rest.'

'Suppose I refuse?'

'Oh! then, my lord, you will have to find some other

person to make little money advances, and to find out those places where your lordship can adventure for half-crowns instead of playing for rouleaux of guineas, which was your former practice. Indeed, your lordship will find it difficult indeed to get on without me.'

Lord Stratherrick was silent awhile. Then he said quietly, and without any show of resentment:

'Pinder, you may bring me this man.'

Pinder retired quietly.

It was not many minutes' walk to Jermyn Street. The landlord of the Grapes returned quickly, bringing with him the unfortunate bankrupt.

He was not a pleasant man to look at, being short and squat in figure, with legs not only short but crooked; his face was inflamed with strong drink, his nose was painted with those flowers of experience called by sailors grog-blossoms, his lips were thick and tremulous, his eyes were shot with red veins, his cheek was purple, his neck was thick. He was dressed, as Mr. Pinder said, in good broad-cloth recently acquired—stout brown cloth, such as a substantial tradesman might wear.

'Lord Stratherrick,' said Pinder softly, and with the greatest deference to his lordship, 'has heard something of your story. His lordship is a nobleman of the most philanthropic character. Tell him everything.'

'I understand, sir'—his lordship raised his head and looked down, without rising from his chair—he was lower than his visitor, yet he looked down upon him; the thing is done by lowering the eyes—'I understand, sir, that you have a history of—of—some kind of misfortune to communicate. I do not promise to offer any relief, understand, though I consent to hear your story.'

'His lordship must be satisfied with the truth—the

complete truth of your story,' Pinder whispered. 'Oh! hundreds of stories are brought to him daily, but he receives them all for examination. 'Tis the most benevolent heart.'

It was, indeed, and it shows that an excellent valet was lost to the world belowstairs when Pinder exchanged the servants' hall for the white apron of the innkeeper in Jermyn Street.

The draper hemmed; the draper hemmed a second time.

'Well, my lord,' he began in a rusty voice, 'I have had great misfortunes.'

'Go on,' Pinder whispered; 'tell him everything—who you were, what you were. If you don't tell him everything, how are you to be helped?'

'I was a draper, my lord, on Ludgate Hill—a draper in a very large way of business, a member of the Drapers' Company. So large was my business, and so extensive my operations, that I was commonly reputed to be in the wholesale line. In fact, I expected to become a member of the court of my company, and to wear a fur gown like all the members of that most honourable court; but my hopes were blasted——'

Pinder whispered:

'Whom by?'

'By a woman—a gentlewoman—a lady of quality. She owed me a large sum of money—£500, more or less.'

It will be seen that the past was viewed by the worthy man through spectacles of imagination.

'Can a great merchant,' asked his lordship, 'be ruined for the want of £500?'

'No, my lord, not as a rule; but there are times when certain calls have to be met, and certain other calls have to

be met, when £500 makes all the difference. I had counted on this £500 ; it was intended to meet certain liabilities. I relied on the lady entirely. She was a lady of rank by marriage, though by birth and education nothing more than the daughter of a London citizen. As the money was overdue, I went to call upon her. I represented the dreadful situation I should be in if she did not pay me. She did not warn me of her intentions——’

‘Otherwise,’ Pinder suggested, ‘I believe that you would have clapped her in the King’s Bench.’

‘I should ; I wish I had done so. I have always regretted that I did not. But we are fools, we great merchants. I trusted her because she was a gentlewoman.’

‘It is reported,’ Pinder again suggested, ‘that you yourself had fallen into difficulties owing to your habits of drinking.’

‘The story is quite false—wicked as well, my lord. I never drink’ (he caught a smile on Pinder’s face)—‘that is, I never used to drink in the days of prosperity. To be sure, the tavern is the natural place for the conduct of business. If I was a good deal in the tavern it was not to drink. The fact only proved the magnitude of my transactions.’

‘The magnitude of your transactions allowed you to fail for the want of £500,’ said Lord Stratherrick quietly.

‘Stick to the truth, stick to the truth, man,’ whispered Pinder. ‘No man in a large way was ever bankrupt for the loss of £500.’

‘Well,’ he went on, grumbling, ‘no matter the magnitude of my transactions or the business carried on at the tavern, the lady owed me £500 and did not pay.’

Said Pinder :

‘When she would not or could not pay, what did you do?’

‘I was expecting her money. I knew that if she did not pay I must be bankrupt, and there came to see me a woman named Mrs. Brymer, a dressmaker, of Monmouth Street, a woman with whom I had done business. “Mr. Fulton,” she said, or “Mr. Joseph Fulton,” I forget which, “I come to you from your debtor. She owes you £500. She cannot pay it.” “Why, madam,” I said, “if she cannot pay it she shall go to prison, and shall there lie till she can pay it.” “Not so, not so,” said Mrs. Brymer, “for the lady has transferred the debt, having been this day married in Newgate to a prisoner named Adolphus Truxo, who is sentenced to death and will be hanged o’ Monday.” At this blow I was, as you may say, fairly knocked over. It was, however, true; the marriage had taken place. I went to Newgate and learned that it was true.’

‘And so,’ said Lord Stratherrick, ‘the lady was married, the man was hanged, and you became bankrupt. Is that all?’

‘Then I became bankrupt. My stock was seized, my furniture was seized; I lost everything I had in the world, and I was turned into the street with my wife and children, penniless.’

‘Your creditors did not, then, as is usual, lock you up?’

‘No, there was some talk of it; but I had nothing—I should never have anything. I have no relatives who could help me; my wife was the daughter of a country parson, who couldn’t help her at all. So they let me go.’

‘And how have you been living since?’

‘It was three years ago. We have been living on the charity of our friends. I have been unable to get employment. Every day I have gone out in search of work, and

have been dependent on my old friends for food and a trifle of drink. If your lordship can help me——'

Pinder whispered :

'Do you want work?'

'Yes, yes. Work is what I want. Work'—he shuddered, as if the prospect of work filled him with terror. 'Work,' he repeated, bracing himself up. 'Hard, honest work of any kind—work. I would sweep out a shop, I would carry the packages and parcels, I would take the money, I would invite the people to come in. Give me work.'

Indeed, he looked most unfit for any kind of work that one could name. How could work be entrusted to that swollen red neck, those purple cheeks, those eyes that stood out like the eyes of shrimps?

'Have you seen the lady since?'

'No, my lord, I have not. If I do see her it will be the worse for her.'

'Why, you would not attempt violence, would you? Have a care, man; have a care! Tyburn Tree is easily reached.'

'If I were to see her. . . . I know not what I should do. Remember, my lord, I had a house and a beautiful shop: a good house—the back windows looked out on St. Martin's burying ground; a good shop, an apprentice, a large stock. I was in good esteem, as I said, in my company. Nay, I did not despair of getting into the Common Council, and perhaps, if business went well and the neighbours were satisfied that I was a man of substance, I might have become an Alderman. And we had our friends—my wife gave parties to her friends, while I and my friends took a bottle in the back parlour. I had a son and a daughter. All these things—'twas the happiest lot in the world—were broken up and destroyed by that

woman—gentlewoman I may not call her. If I were to meet her, I say I know not what I should do.’

‘Since your failure you have been living on charity, you say.’

‘I have picked up food and drink. My wife and children, I fear, have suffered terrible privations—through that woman. We slept in a single room—an upstairs room—without furniture—without a scrap of furniture—through that woman. They were in rags because everything was sold—through that woman; they were mostly starving always—through that woman.’

‘Could your son do anything?’

‘He ran away and went to sea.’

‘And your daughter?’

‘She could do nothing. But a lady has taken her for a companion—the same lady gives my wife a lodging and a small allowance.’

‘Oh!’ A sudden suspicion—I know not why—struck his listener. ‘What is the name of your daughter?’

‘Alice.’

‘Alice—Alice. This is curious and unexpected. Sir, if you met that lady you would at any rate speak your mind to her.’

‘I would—I would indeed.’

‘There are footmen at the beck and call of a gentlewoman. Suppose they kicked you out of doors?’

‘They would not kick me out before I asked them for news of the widow of Adolphus Truxo, negro, who was hanged three years ago. Mrs. Truxo, I shall call her—Mrs. Adolphus Truxo, widow of that great, brawny, hulking negro whom I saw in the courtyard, his irons clinking, who walked about, a pannikin of rum in his hand. Mrs. Adolphus Truxo, widow of that great negro. It is

a creditable marriage for a gentlewoman, is it not, my lord ?

He stopped, having said all that occurred to him. Lord Stratherrick looked at him gravely, his chin upon his hand.

‘I am interested,’ he said ; ‘go on.’

‘Your fortune,’ whispered Pinder, ‘is as good as made. He is interested in your story.’

‘So far, I say that I am interested in your story ; but I must make inquiries about it. Meantime, I think that the best thing you can do is to hold your tongue. I have heard something of your case before. Pinder has been good enough to speak of it. If you blazon abroad the story as you have told it to me, you will do yourself harm rather than good. For it is reported that you were in quite a small shop’ (the draper held up his hands. ‘Oh ! the wickedness of men’), ‘that you had neglected your business for the tavern, where you spent all your time’ (the draper shook his head—‘that men should tell such lies !’), ‘and that your bankruptcy was quite certain without the lady’s fortune to pay this debt, and that instead of £500 the debt was nearer £100’ (the draper groaned heavily). ‘Very well, that will do. You need not groan or hold up your hands any more. Now listen. Pinder, here, will carry out my intentions as regards your case. I admit that you have something to complain of. Go, now, with Pinder to his tavern of the Grapes. You will observe silence about your case, while I consider what can be done for you. Pinder has promised to give you as much food and drink as you choose to call for—beer, wine, or punch, so long as you hold your tongue. If you talk, you will be turned into the street with a bill against you for drink provided. You understand ? Turned into the street’—his lordship

shook a threatening finger—‘turned into the street. Take him away, Pinder.’

The bankrupt and Pinder having vanished, his lordship drew out of his pocket a document on large paper, and engrossed in a round, upright hand—the hand of a law stationer or clerk. He knew the hand well, having in the old days, when he had still something to sell, experienced the clerkly writing on many occasions.

‘Like an old friend,’ he murmured, opening the document, which had been brought to him that morning.

It was counsel’s opinion as to the question asked, viz., whether, if a woman who has transferred her liabilities to her husband becomes wealthy after his death, she is bound to discharge her debts.

The opinion was short, and to the effect that in such a case, the liabilities having been transferred to the husband, his widow is not liable for any of the debts, however great they may be, and however rich the widow may have become.

‘At the same time,’ said the counsel learned in the law, ‘there can be no doubt that the widow should, if she can, discharge these liabilities of her own free will, and without the least obligation by law.’

‘Quite so,’ said the reader, folding up the document and replacing it in his pocket. ‘I know the law, of course, as well as the learned counsel, and I knew very well what he would say about the obligation to discharge those liabilities. Yes, yes, it will be interesting in a day or two, perhaps, to remind him of this opinion, and of the person to whom it relates—the person whom he regards as an angel. I don’t know why. Isabel lost all her money where I lost mine, but she had less to lose. Then she was straitened and her condition pressed her, so she did a very

sensible thing—what any woman would do under the conditions if she could. She shifted her burden on to the back of a man about to die. The world entirely approves of such conduct, but the world condemns a woman who is foolish enough to be found out. Suppose such a woman defies the world and brazens it out, why, it is but a few card-parties, a party or two to Vauxhall, a water-party with horns and a supper, and the woman is forgiven.’

So he went on in meditation. If we put his meditations into words, it is not that he uttered any words at all, but only that his thoughts took this turn :

‘But there is the bankrupt. If we let him loose upon the enemy, what can he do ? He might go to the house and brawl before the door, to be knocked down by the lackeys, or he might tell the whole story in Pinder’s parlour, and so the scandal would fly all over the town. Then, as I said, Isabel might brazen it out, and be very little the worse. Better for him to keep quiet. Let him have his fill of rum and port and beer ; that swollen neck will burst before long. If he drinks as much as he can, he will not last a month, or little more. To keep him silent the drink is all he wants. How much will Isabel give ? The scoundrel Pinder ! He will stand in, will he ? We shall see. Isabel shall give me—to keep Fulton quiet—what ? The original debt—say £200 ; something for the last three years—say £100 ; something for the future—say another £200 : total, £500. Yes, £500 ; perhaps she will make it more—but £500 ! I shall give Pinder £50 to cover the drink bill and all. The greedy scoundrel ! He would stand in with his master, would he ? The impudence of the age is frightful ; they respect nothing, not even rank and a star.

‘And the man’s daughter, Isabel’s companion. It is Isabel again who has found a respectable lodging for the girl’s mother, and gives her an allowance. This is conscience money. Apparently the man does not know who his daughter’s patron is, nor does the mother know, nor the father. It will not pay me to let that scandal loose, while it will pay me to keep the man quiet. My dear Isabel, with your miserable £16 a month, I see before you a whole peck of troubles if this man is let loose; and a very comfortable little income for me if the man is kept quiet.’

Just then—his thoughts were roaming backwards and forwards over the same ground; indeed, his meditations that we have abridged into five minutes occupied an hour or more—a visitor arrived. It was no other than the girl Alice. She brought with her a note from Isabel. The note was brief and to the point; it was in answer to his request for a loan, or an advance, or an increased allowance—something to do with more money. His lordship generally wrote such a letter about once a month; he was never tired of writing the letter, and Isabel was never tired of answering in the same way:

‘No, my lord’ (she wrote), ‘certainly not; the allowance, and nothing but the allowance. No advance; no increase; no payment of debts. If you have liabilities, get rid of them your own way. For my part, I give you £16 a month, or £4 a week, with dinner in St. James’s Square when you please. With that you will have to be content.

‘ISABEL.’

‘Is there any answer to take back?’ asked the messenger.

‘No, child, so,’ he replied very sweetly. ‘There is no answer. Thank my sister-in-law for me. By the way, I have seen you in St. James’s Square sometimes, have I not?’ He had dined there most days, so that it would have been strange had he not seen her.

‘I have been my lady’s companion for two months and more.’

‘To be sure. You make music of an evening; you read to your patron. And you walk with her. Your name, if I remember aright, is Alice.’

‘At your service, my lord.’

‘Alice, you are a very pretty girl. I regret—but that avails not: what is your surname, Alice?’

‘My name is Fulton.’

‘Ah! There are Fultons of Shropshire. You are a member of that old family—of a younger branch, perhaps?’

‘No, my lord. I am not connected with gentry in any way.’

‘Indeed. Beauty wants not family.’

‘My father was a draper on Ludgate Hill, who unfortunately became bankrupt three years ago.’

‘Oh, really,—a bankrupt! That was a great misfortune to him—and to you.’

‘A terrible misfortune indeed.’

‘Pray, what was the cause of this disaster? Bad debts, perhaps?’

‘There were some bad debts, no doubt. Everyone in business makes bad debts. But my brother, who knew what happened, told me that the bad debts were few and not enough to break my poor father.’

‘Oh! there were other reasons, then.’

‘My lord, a girl ought not to expose the sins of her father. It is enough that had he attended to his

business he might have been by this time a prosperous citizen.'

'Your sentiments, Alice, do honour to your heart. And how has your father supported you since this failure?'

'He goes out every day to look for work, and he comes home in the evening without having found it. Pray, my lord, do not ask more questions about my father.'

'I will not, Alice. Still, your account of yourself, from one of so much beauty—nay, never blush—must be interesting. My sister-in-law is fortunate in possessing such a companion.'

'My lord, she is an angel.'

'I rejoice to hear it. Angels are scarce in these days. She found you; she adopted you; she placed your mother, I have learned from her, in respectable lodgings—surely this was a good work. Well, Alice, I congratulate both her and you. I hope that you may continue to find my sister-in-law an angel. Thank her in my name for the answer to my letter. Tell her she wants nothing but wings, which, gilt at the edges, would become her vastly, in order to become the guardian angel to all brothers-in-law. Good-morning, my pretty Alice, good-morning. And, Alice, tell her if you please—by such a messenger one should only send gracious and pleasing messages—tell her that I intend to call upon her to-morrow morning soon after noon, and that I hope to find her at home—and alone—tell her that I hope to find her alone.'

CHAPTER XIII

‘TELL ME WHAT YOU WANT’

‘I AM glad,’ said Lord Stratherrick, ‘to find you at home, Isabel, and for once alone. Mostly, if a man wants speech with you, he finds that you are driving about the town from milliner to mercer, and from dressmaker to draper.’

‘A body must make herself decent, my lord. Would you like me, for the credit of your family, to go in the rags and tatters of last year’s fashions?’

Conversation with his lordship always began in a light and airy tone, becoming by degrees serious, grave, and even heated.

‘Or you are cheek by jowl with your companion, so that it is impossible to have a few words privately with you. A mighty pretty girl. She is—let me see—you call her Alice—Alice what?’

‘Does her name matter?’

‘Why, no, with such a face as that. I suppose she may be the daughter of a cit—perhaps a broken-down cit.’ Isabel changed colour. ‘What does it matter, as you say? Only I wonder that she has not already been persuaded by one of the young fellows.’

‘My lord, pray understand that Alice is under my especial charge. The young fellows are not encouraged to buzz about her.’

‘She could not be in better keeping, or, let me say it, Isabel, more pleasant.’ His words were friendly, but Isabel knew him, and she heard another meaning in his voice and saw another light in his eyes. ‘You will guard her under lock and key. It is very well known to the world that you are a dragon, Isabel. I come, however, not to talk to you about Alice, but about a matter of very much greater importance. How important it is you will be yourself, I am sure, the first to acknowledge.’

‘If it refers to your lordship’s letter, I have already written and sent an answer. I am only sorry that it must, as usual, be a refusal. Your lordship knows very well why.’

‘I said *important*, Isabel. Can my poor, slight, and humble wants be called important? No. I asked only for an advance of a few guineas. You refuse. Well, you have the purse. My business refers to something far more important—very far more important, I say!’

His lordship assumed a look and a manner which might have been borrowed from those of a discontented mute at a cheap funeral.

‘I have already,’ Isabel repeated, ‘and more than once, informed you that beyond the monthly allowance and the rent of lodging and the price of dress which your rank requires—all of which I will cheerfully pay you for the sake of my late husband, your brother—I will not go on any consideration whatever.’

‘Isabel, you distress me; your harsh words pain me. I assure you again that I have to speak on a matter of the very highest importance. Pray do not think that I refer to your trumpery allowance. I call it trumpery in consideration of my rank and my position as head of the family. Doubtless to you, brought up in the practice of

making and saving money, it seems a munificent allowance. I am not going to speak of it. What is an allowance—what is my comfort, compared with your happiness—nay, your reputation, your very existence as a blameless woman?’

‘My very existence as a blameless woman?’ Isabel sat up, stung into interest, but as yet she suspected nothing. ‘Pray, my lord, lose no more time in beating about the bush. Tell me at once what you mean by this solemn preamble. In what way is my reputation attacked? How is my very existence as a blameless woman endangered?’

‘I have to remind you, Isabel, with great pain, believe me——’

‘Oh, do not trouble about your own pain.’ Indeed, his face, despite his efforts to convey sympathy and sorrow, expressed a certain unholy joy rather than any kind of pain. ‘Go on with your communication.’

‘I have to carry you back two or three years, Isabel,’ he went on, ‘back to a time when, some few years after my lamented brother’s death, you made the very distressing discovery that you had gone through the whole of the fortune left you by him—a modest fortune, to be sure; I felt at the time of his death with you and for you—yet it was the fortune of a younger son. I could not make it more. As for getting through it, it was my own experience; pray do not think that I blame you for extravagance. Not at all. Well, you came to the end of it in three years or so after his decease. You began as a widow with a small but sufficient income of about £200 or £250 a year; it should have been enough, with prudence, for your life. Unfortunately, you were not prudent. You must needs, being only a merchant’s

daughter, live like a woman of fashion; it was not enough. You not only spent the income, but you squandered the capital, till one morning you found that there was nothing left. Again my own experience—quite my own experience. Do not think, my dear Isabel, that I am thinking even of reproach.’

‘All this,’ said Isabel, ‘is quite true. I did find out, to my alarm, that most of my capital was gone. I lost it at the card-table. I do not know how you discovered this fact, which, to tell the truth, I myself would willingly forget. I was improvident; I was careless; I never looked into my own affairs. My only excuse is that I had never before had the management of any affairs.’

‘As for that’—he waved his hands as if no secret could be kept from him—‘I learned the story as one may learn all stories, if he knows the right way to discover things. Some men never learn anything that goes on. To others there is no such thing as a sealed book. I admit, Isabel, that I only learned the story the other day. By what means? That concerns me. I am not, though straitened in my circumstances owing to the pitiful nature of your allowance, without resource, without friends, or without influence.’

‘Pray go on, then, if you have anything more to say.’

Isabel’s cheek flushed. How much did he know? What had he discovered?

‘I’ve a great deal more to say. In this difficulty, with a debtors’ prison threatening, you might, I suppose, have appealed to your father. I apprehend that you did not; I say that I am not certain on this point, because I know nothing of what is done on the other side of Charing Cross. You have told me that he was a hard and austere person, one who would certainly regard with the

greatest severity all extravagances of the fashionable world—the card-table among other things. I believe that this kind of parent would show very little toleration for the thousand and one delightful and charming follies—even the venial faults—of a fashionable woman; especially, I suppose—but I may be wrong—that the London merchant has small consideration for a woman who spends £4,000 in two or three years, and finally finds herself in debt.’

‘What you say is quite true. I could not apply to my father, for he would have refused his assistance—and with austerity; nor could I apply to you, for you were head over ears in difficulties already. However, I was in difficulties. I lived through them. I am now rich. What more is there to be said?’

His face showed that there was a good deal more to be said. Isabel saw the smile upon his lips, and her heart sunk. He went on:

‘I wanted all the money I had for my own necessities, so that it would have been useless for you to apply to me. However, under these circumstances, someone suggested to you another way. Shall I tell you that way?’ He sank his voice to a whisper. ‘Someone—I know not who—pointed out to you that it was possible to transfer the whole of your debts to another person by the simple plan of marrying him.’ Isabel started with a cry of dismay. He knew, then, this! He knew! This enemy of hers knew. What would happen? ‘And since you, naturally, could not find any ordinary person who would knowingly incur those debts, you had to consider the very disagreeable necessity of marrying a man actually under sentence of death, to whom a few hundreds—or thousands—mattered nothing.’

Isabel changed colour; she sank back in her chair and turned pale; she clasped her hands; she moaned: ‘Oh, he knows! he knows!’

‘Yes, Isabel, I know—I know. I am truly sorry to give you pain, but I must tell the story right through, just to show you that I know everything. We will have no secrets from each other. What happened then? You found, or someone found for you, such a man—a common fellow sentenced to death. You were taken—I do not know by whom the business was managed; it is not worth the trouble of finding out—to Newgate Prison; there in the wretched courtyard, where these creatures jingle their chains and parade an ostentatious bravery, you were introduced to the man——’

‘No, no,’ said Isabel, panting; ‘it is not true. I did not exchange one word with him.’

‘I suppose that no words were necessary. A negro, besides, has small powers of conversation. The language of gallantry is not known to him. I suppose a parson from the Fleet was easy to be procured? These gentry are always in attendance about Fleet Bridge; in that interesting chapel formed by the Press Yard, with its high and picturesque walls—I have not seen them, but I dare say they are picturesque—no windows and no roof, in the presence of a crowd of worthy and responsible witnesses, some of whom were themselves going to be hanged, and could therefore enter into the situation with full enjoyment, and the rest their friends—ladies and gentlemen, no doubt, of the highest walks in City society—you were married. The widow of my brother, the Honourable Ronald Weyland, was married in Newgate, by a Fleet parson, to a condemned negro—a condemned negro! What an honour to our family! All this is quite true, is it not?’

‘It is quite true,’ she murmured faintly.

‘The respected name of your second husband was, I learn, Adolphus Truxo. He was a full-blooded black—a stalwart negro from the Gold Coast, or Barbadoes, or perhaps somewhere else. He became your husband, being at the time expectant of the gallows in a few days. I suppose you rewarded him with as much drink as he could consume during the short remainder of his valuable and interesting life. My dear sister-in-law,’ he said, his hand on hers, ‘you are no longer the widow of the Honourable Ronald Weyland, but the widow of Adolphus Truxo—a negro whose bones now hang on wires, presumably, in one of the rooms of the College of Surgeons. You are Mrs. Adolphus Truxo.’

He regarded his sister-in-law with a peculiar complacency. She now lay on the sofa, crushed and huddled up, panting and moaning. She could say nothing; she had no reply to offer: she was surprised; she had fallen into an ambush, so to speak. She had been attacked from a most unexpected quarter, and for the moment she had no defence to offer. Yet she understood very well that the attack would mean a demand for money; and already from the depths of her shame and misery she had begun to think how best she could meet those demands.

Everybody knows the swiftness of thought. Isabel saw already her brother-in-law making use of this knowledge to extort money, and always more money, from her. There was a look of triumph in his eyes which proclaimed his intention. What else did he intend? To parade the story? It was not a story which even Lord Stratherrick, about whose name clung so many scandals and strange histories, would care to proclaim. She might defy him; she might bid him do his worst.

Lord Stratherrick contemplated her, I say, with a peculiar complacency. ‘She feels it,’ he thought. ‘So much the better—so much the better.’

Presently the lady opened her eyes and looked round. She had partly recovered her self-possession. She could temporize; she could put off a decision, whatever her brother-in-law might propose.

‘Shall I get a glass of wine—or water—or anything?’ he asked. ‘Remember, Isabel, that this matter need not—need not, I say—go beyond you and me. It may be arranged; it may remain our secret.’

‘Oh, go on! Only go on—go on and get it over. Every word you say is like a knife to my heart. I thought that no one would find out the dreadful story.’

‘Dear, dear! I told you, Isabel, that the subject was most important—far more important than my miserable allowance. After all, since I alone know the story of that marriage—that is to say, only I myself and one or two persons who need not be considered—and since the matter is thus between you and me alone, we may arrange things so that you may be quite easy in your mind—quite easy. In me, Isabel, you have your closest friend and your nearest relation. Let me retain your confidence.’

‘Have you finished? Believe me, the memory of that day fills me with shame and remorse. I had hoped that not one single person was left who knew anything about it.’

‘My sister-in-law, consider. Is there anything in the whole world that no one knows except the person who did it? Isabel, I am here to remind you’—he dropped his voice—‘not only of the thing which we would both bury in the deepest oblivion, if we could, but also, unfortunately, of a person who knows this history and will spread it about if he is not prevented.’

‘Who is he?’

‘Among your creditors, Isabel—quite a humble person—was a man with a draper’s shop to whom you owed some money. Who would believe that a mere draper could be feared? He came to you before you acted as you did, begging you to pay up.’

‘The man came to me half drunk and vapoured about his wealth and his resources.’

‘Well, you know what happened to him?’

‘He went bankrupt, partly, I hear, through my inability to pay. I have been told, however, that he was bankrupt already.’

‘Vapouring or not, drunk or sober, he went bankrupt. We cannot deny the fact.’

‘I suppose he did. Of course he did. His drunken habits ruined him, not my small debt.’

‘Well, Isabel, you have acted as one who is influenced by remorse. What was your sin? You found his family the other day in the greatest misery. You very generously relieved their distresses. Why? Because you caused them. Everybody will attribute that as the cause. You very generously provided for the wife; you have given her a weekly allowance—why? Because you had previously ruined her husband. You have made his daughter your companion—why? Because you yourself were the cause of their poverty.’

‘It is true that I have done all this, and perhaps because I may have had some share in the father’s ruin. Some share, but not all.’

‘The world will say that it is conscience money. Your action proves your remorse and penitence and—and—all those virtues—things that they preach in church, as well as your goodness of heart. But, Isabel, it will not stop the

man’s thirst for money. He is most vindictive ; he thirsts for revenge ; he demands reparation ; he is rapacious. I have no doubt that he exaggerates your share in his ruin in order to get money from you. But’—his lordship shrugged his shoulders—‘there, my dear Isabel, is the situation.’

‘What can the man do?’

‘It is not only the bankruptcy. When the man was told that your debts were shifted on to one Truxo under sentence of death, he naturally went to Newgate to inquire ; there he saw the man, your husband, the black, and heard from him a confirmation of your marriage. He knows, therefore, about the marriage.’

‘What can the man do?’ she repeated.

‘He is desperate ; he seems not to know who it is that has befriended his wife and daughter ; his thirst for revenge grows daily greater ; his bankruptcy, I am quite prepared to believe, was due to his own drinking habits, and not to your debt at all ; yet he has forgotten the former circumstance, and now says that it was due to you, and to no one but you. As for what he can do : he might come to this house and brawl and bellow all kinds of things, including, of course, the marriage with the late Adolphus Truxo, *sus. per coll.* Your people would quickly throw him out, and, if necessary, beat him to a jelly. Nothing would please me better than to see the creature beaten to a jelly. He is loathsome ; he is a walking cask of liquor ; it makes one sick to talk to him, or even to look at him : but would the beating help in keeping things quiet ? That, however, is not the chief danger. He has access to a certain tavern frequented and used almost entirely by gentlemen’s servants. He will tell his story with his own exaggerations and embellishments to

these fellows, who are all greedy of scandal, and live, so to speak, upon gossip concerning their masters and mistresses. They will go home, and they will carry the scandals to the servants' hall.'

'What does it matter to us how they talk in the servants' hall?'

'Stay a little. The lady's-maid takes her meals in the servants' hall. The lady's-maid talks to her mistress. The lady's-maid retails to her mistress all the scandal that she hears. A lady's-maid is partly valued for the gossip and scandal she can bring to her mistress. Remember that; and remember, therefore, that twenty-four hours after the infuriated bankrupt has told his story it will be all over the town. Now, Isabel, I ask you—as a friend, as your brother-in-law—out of respect to my name, can you afford to allow this scandal to be spread abroad?'

Isabel groaned. She did not faint any more; the first shock was over. She was in the meshes of the net, but she was thinking how best to defeat the nobleman's purpose, which she understood.

'Now, my dear Isabel, I am your friend in this business—not your only friend, perhaps, but your true friend. Frankly, I do not desire any family scandal to arise out of it; we have had a good many scandals of which I have been, I confess, the cause—sometimes the innocent and much misrepresented cause; sometimes the unfortunate cause; sometimes the cause through carelessness and inadvertence. Let us avoid another scandal. I can keep this man quiet by the very simple process of paying him. Oh, not great sums of money. I can keep him quiet by a very moderate expenditure.'

'How can you prevent his talking? He will take as much of your money as you choose to give him, and

then he will talk. Who can bridle the tongue of a drunkard ?’

‘He will not be able to talk. I shall make it quite clear that if he tells his story in the parlour of the tavern, or anywhere else, I shall hear of it, and he will get no more money. The man, Isabel, is a half-drunken, besotted wretch, purple and swollen with strong drink. I propose to give him, to begin with, the run of the tavern ; he shall drown himself in rum if he will. The sooner he makes an end of himself, the better. But he must be paid. And I, Isabel, will undertake to pay him, and to keep him quiet.’

Isabel listened attentively, but with distrust and suspicion. Her brother-in-law would keep the man quiet ; he would pay the man. She knew his lordship well enough to be quite sure that he meant to take most of the money she might give him for himself, and she further understood that he had taken up the case with the intention of getting money out of it for himself. She rose, therefore, to terminate the talk.

‘I will consider,’ she said.

‘You will consider ? My dear Isabel, by all means consider. But time presses—time is valuable. Every hour is of importance. We may be too late.’

She sat down again.

‘What do you propose, then ?’

‘I have with me’—he drew forth a paper—‘an opinion procured by my attorney from a learned counsel in the Inner Temple. Here is a copy. The case was sent to the lawyer whom I meet sometimes—your friend Mr. Macnamara.’

Isabel took it. The opinion was signed ‘Oliver Macnamara.’

‘You observe that he is of opinion, clearly, that this money should be paid?’

She read the opinion rapidly.

‘You have sent the case to him, have you?—to my intimate friend? My lord, it was a mean and treacherous act.’

‘Mean? Treacherous? Why? Mr. Macnamara can know nothing; he can guess nothing.’

She blazed out in her wrath:

‘It is enough. It was a mean and a treacherous act—such an act as I might have expected of you. Enough, I say! Tell me what you want.’

‘Briefly, the whole debt with interest; ample compensation for long suffering; maintenance money—say in all, and to be very moderate, £800. I do not resent your language, Isabel. Mean and treacherous? Yet it was to save you. And I cannot do the job for sixpence less.’

Isabel rose again. She was now more composed.

‘I will consider,’ she said. ‘Not a word more, if you please. I will consider.’

CHAPTER XIV

WHAT THE WIFE SAID

To be known as having endeavoured to shift debts, or as having succeeded in shifting debts, to the shoulders of a husband married for the purpose is not in itself, by many ladies who get into debt, considered as a dishonourable act. The fact is to be regretted, perhaps, but it is a fact ; the method is known and widely recommended. It is done every day. Not only in the prisons, but in and about Fleet Market and the purlieus of May Fair, there are men who are well known to have been married dozens of times ; they make a practice or profession of marriage ; they laugh at the risk ; they trust that the repeated marriages will not be found out, and, by changing their names, they make discovery extremely difficult. Again, there are sailors always ready to marry anyone, with no matter how large an encumbrance of debt, provided they are paid in advance and can see their way to sheer off directly after the marriage ceremony, and before the creditors get wind of the thing. There are, again, men on the Poor side of the Fleet and the King's Bench who are, as we have seen, equally ready, in return for a small allowance, to enter upon this pretence at marriage. All which means that it is a widely-known and common practice, and that there are plenty of men who are ready to meet the wishes of the women and to grant their

safety. A woman who does such a thing certainly sacrifices a certain amount of self-respect; but most women who do it have a very small amount of self-respect. To begin with, only in very extreme circumstances can a woman justify such an action to her own soul. Isabel, for instance, could never so calm the accusations of an uneasy conscience.

The ladies who thus shift their liabilities are generally City madams or widows of City tradesmen. When one gets to the fashionable quarter the thing is more rare. It is not perhaps unknown, but it is concealed most carefully; fashion tolerates many things, but not such a clandestine marriage. A woman in the position, for instance, of Isabel, with a fortune of some thousands a year, a house in St. James's Street, an establishment corresponding to her income, and enjoying the best society, could certainly not afford to be known as having taken advantage of a legal quibble accidentally—one cannot believe that it was designedly—provided for debtors who cannot pay. She could not afford to have her name dragged down into the mud wherever other women meet together; nor could she afford the danger of proving to be the wife of some degraded common creature. She might try to brazen it out, but after such a discovery her position and consideration would never be the same as it was before.

If, with such a record of a pretended marriage, it were also to be discovered that the husband was not a common suitor, who may be an honest fellow enough; or a prisoner on the Poor side, who may even be a gentleman; but a black—one of the degraded sons of Ham—a horrid black, a despised and contemptible negro, perhaps a slave from Barbadoes or the Guinea Coast—actually a negro, condemned to the gallows and the dissection-table for

some infamous crime, some low conspiracy, some shameful robbery—the general opinion of the world, even the most easy world, would certainly be very much against the bride of such a marriage. It might be held pardonable to enter into such a marriage, if necessary and under the direst pressure, but it must be with a white man. To go through the form of marriage with a black, even if he were going to be hanged that very day, would certainly be considered a thing beyond the power of forgiveness or excuse. Except in the case of Isabel I have never heard of such a marriage.

Isabel knew all this perfectly well. If the story was made public, her own position would be irretrievably ruined. She would be known everywhere as Mrs. Adolphus Truxo, widow of a skeleton hanging by a nail and dangling in wires. Mrs. Adolphus Truxo! Heavens! How could she endure the ridicule? And the man who knew the story was breathing fire and fury and flames of revenge. He must be silenced; but she knew her brother-in-law too well to trust him with money in order to silence the man. She saw very plainly, on the part of that noble lord, a design of nourishing and guarding a secret with which he would keep her in terror and himself continually in funds for gambling and his beloved cockpit.

She resolved, first of all, to visit the man's wife, and to lay before her, if she should not already know it, the position of the affair. Whether this poor woman knew the history or not, it was quite certain that she was most ready and most eager to do anything she was asked to do for the generous benefactress who had rescued her from starvation and now kept her in sufficiency and comfort, so that, for the first time since her unfortunate wedding-day, which should have been marked by every ill omen, she was free

from anxiety. When Isabel opened her door she was sitting at the window on the sunny side, having needle-work of some kind in her hands for a pretence, and crooning to herself out of sheer comfort of body and contentment of mind. She sprang to her feet.

‘Why, madam!’ she cried. ‘It is madam herself!’

‘Yes, I have come to see you. Let me sit down.’ Isabel threw herself upon a chair and covered her face with her hands, trying to collect her troubled thoughts. ‘Yes, I have come—I have come—to see you. I want to talk to you—I want your advice—I want your help,’ she kept on repeating. ‘I want to tell you something, unless you know it already. I am in terrible trouble, Mrs. Fulton, and you may be able to help me. I think you would help me if you could. Perhaps you know—perhaps you can guess.’

‘Me, madam? Trouble come to you? Indeed I cannot guess.’

‘I have been brought face to face with a great danger—a terrible danger.’

‘But, madam, how can I help? If I could, Heaven above knows how proud and happy I should be!’

‘You do not know who I am. Your daughter, perhaps, has never told you my name.’

‘Oh yes, she has! You are Mrs. Weyland, and you are the widow of the late Honourable Ronald Weyland. Was the girl wrong in telling me?’

‘Certainly not—only—after all that has passed—and your husband only restrained from insult or violence by ignorance of my residence——’

‘Insult? from my husband? Why, madam, what has he to do with you?’

‘Has he told you nothing, then, about me?—nothing at

all? That is very strange. Mrs. Fulton, do not hide things from me.'

'Dear madam, my husband comes home every evening as drunk as David's sow. He goes into that small room there—I call it Alice's room—as soon as he gets home, and throws himself on the bed, where all night long he sleeps like a log and snores like a pig. In the morning his mouth is as dry as a lime-kiln, and his hands just shake and hang down like two bellropes. He never speaks. He only rests at night and shakes in the morning. Then he goes out. He never speaks. Not one word does he say; holds out his hand for his allowance—ninepence a day I give him, not a penny more—and he goes away. And I see him no more until late at night when he tumbles up the stairs.'

'Let me confess, then: I am the woman who could not pay her debt of £90 or so when he had his shop on Ludgate Hill, and therefore was the cause, he says, of the bankruptcy. Heaven knows I did not wish to make him bankrupt.'

'Oh, madam, were you in truth that lady? I have heard of her often enough.'

'Alas, Mrs. Fulton! I am none other.'

'Well, but—no, no! It was not any bad debt, madam—not yours nor any other—which made him bankrupt, whatever he may say now. I remember the whole business quite well. Indeed, I have cause to remember it. You are quite mistaken, madam—oh, I assure you, quite mistaken!'

'He called upon me. He said that if I did not pay that very day he should be bankrupt.'

'Dear madam, my husband—I am sorry and ashamed to say it; how can I deny or conceal the truth?—is a very

bad man. It is not only the drink, but the dishonesty. Had it not been for the drink, he would not have been dishonest. Many a man for much less than he has done has been hanged. When he told you that story he was already bankrupt; he wanted your money for himself; he would have defrauded the creditors to whom it should have been paid. The creditors would not have pressed you. They would have granted you the time you asked for. Madam, I know this—I knew it at the time—but I did not know your name.’

‘Oh! Is this true? Then, I might have been spared—oh! I might have been spared all this shame and reproach.’

‘Dear madam, you must not think of shame and reproach. My husband forced you to do—whatever it was.’

‘I might have been spared,’ Isabel repeated, clasping her hands. ‘Heavens! I might have been spared.’

‘You did no harm to my husband: you only prevented him, I say, from defrauding his creditors. Alas! I know too well that he was ruined already.’

‘He threatens to make a scandal. He is furious against me. I am told that he is only kept quiet by money.’

‘If he gets money for silence, he will keep silent—unless he is encouraged by others to talk. Madam, do not trust him. Never trust a drunkard. He has no control over his babbling tongue. Better refuse to give him any money at all and let him babble.’

‘Should I see him? Should I tell him plainly to do his worst?’

‘No, madam, you must not see him. Indeed, I know not when you could see him. In the morning, after leaving this lodging, he takes a glass of purl, to settle his stomach, he says; then he takes a pint of wine, if any one of his old friends will give it him—if not, he drinks beer; in either

case he is bemused before noon; he sleeps it off in the afternoon; and he is speechless in the evening.'

'Yet he may be taken in hand by designing persons.' I fear she meant her noble brother-in-law as a designing person.

'Madam, I think you have nothing to fear. My husband may go off in the morning with the intention of making a scandal. But he cannot stick to any purpose, such is the muddle of his poor wits; he drinks himself silly, and he forgets the intention with which he set out. Besides, he is too great a coward.'

'If I could believe this of him!'

'Madam, to-morrow morning I will speak to him. I will tell him that he is living at this moment on your bounty. He is too far gone in drink to be grateful—no one, to be sure, ever saw gratitude and drink go together—but he can understand, at least, where his ninepence a day comes from.'

With this assurance Isabel had to go away. It was not much comfort, because she had little faith in the influence of the wife. Who can influence a man always in liquor? A drunkard is beyond the power, not only of reason and of common-sense, but also of affection and duty. Still, it was a relief to be told that it was not by her own misdoing that this family fell into failure and ruin.

The wife had no influence: reason and common-sense were powerless. You shall hear. Next morning the man awoke with the customary thirst upon him—a colossal, invincible, overwhelming, truly irresistible thirst; his mouth was filled with dust and ashes; his lips trembled; his hand shook. These symptoms were of daily occurrence; they vanished with the first draught of small ale, for which, as a rule, he had to wait until, with his ninepence,

he could get out into the street. This morning, however, he was astonished to find that a tankard—a large brown George—awaited him, full of the liquor for which he was fainting and suffering. He seized the mug, and with an eager gasp drank off about a pint at a draught, setting it down and looking around him with a sigh of relief inexpressible.

‘Husband,’ said his wife, ‘you are better for your drink? Very well. There is something I have to say. Attend now, before you drink any more. The first draught clears your brain : the next makes it muddy.’

‘Go on, then.’ He listened, but he grasped the jug and looked longingly into the cool and brown contents. ‘Go on—quick! I want more.’

‘I have now learned the name of the lady who has befriended us—the lady, I mean, who has given us this lodging, who feeds and clothes us, and has taken Alice into her house. Her name——’ By this time he had lifted the jug and held it ready for the proper place of all jugs—the human lips. ‘Don’t drink yet. Stop a moment. Attend now. Her name is the Honourable Isabel Weyland.’

‘What?’ He set down the jug, unfinished. ‘What? Say that again.’

‘A lady who once owed you a certain sum of money which you wanted paid to yourself so as to defraud your creditors.’

‘Weyland! Weyland!’ The man shrieked the name. ‘The woman who wouldn’t pay me that money?’

‘The money was not due. You wanted to get it yourself, and so to keep it from the creditors.’

‘She married and transferred the debt. A wicked woman! A dishonest woman! For want of that money I became a bankrupt.’

‘Don’t tell lies. You were a bankrupt before. Your creditors lost, not you; your intention was to put it in your own pocket, if you could get it. Do you mean to deny that fact?’

He did not deny the fact. He rolled the jug about so as to produce another head of foam, and growled between his teeth :

‘What do women know about business?’

‘Well, Mrs. Weyland finds this lodging, gives me an allowance, provides clothes instead of rags for all of us, and makes Alice her companion. We owe everything to her.’

‘Oh! She gives you this lodging and your beggarly allowance, does she? You may have no proper pride, but I have. She gives all this, and you take it—you take it—you! Where is your spirit? But that’s all over. Out you go! Alice shall come home. I won’t take charity from anyone. I’m an independent freeman of the City. Charity? I scorn it—I scorn it! I scorn you! Where’s your spirit? Where’s your pride?’

He finished the jug. The second draught, as his wife told him, clouded his brain; he forgot his threat and his noble spirit, and began on another line of thought.

‘Wife,’ he said, with a look of cunning, ‘let us understand what this means. She’s afraid—that is what she is—she’s afraid. Where this money comes from there is more. I shall make her pay more; and she shall pay me, not you. Ha! she shall have a man to deal with this time, not a poor-spirited female—a man!’

‘A man! You call yourself a man!’ The wife laughed scornfully. ‘You don’t know yourself. You a man! You! A pretty man! What can you do? What harm

can you do to the lady—you, who are too drunk to talk all day long!’

‘I have made friends—good friends, powerful friends—at the Grapes in Jermyn Street, where the drink is good. They will back me up. Ha! I will make this woman’s life miserable; I will threaten her; I will write her letters.’

‘Have done!’ said his wife. ‘Now, remember. So long as you refrain from molesting this lady you may have your bedroom and your ninepence a day. If you begin to trouble her, out you go, into the street—do you hear? into the street—with nothing. Do you hear? Do you understand? Are you sober enough to hear plain English?’

She was taller and stronger than her husband, who, besides, was in poor condition in consequence of his drinking habits. She took him by the shoulders and shook him with some violence.

‘There!’ she said. ‘Now be reasonable, if you can.’

‘Woman,’ he cried, when he had recovered a little from this discipline, ‘I have made friends—at the Grapes in Jermyn Street—I defy you. I laugh at you. Your threats I despise. I shall go to my friends—my powerful friends——’

‘Then, go. You come no more to this lodging. Go! I will not maintain an ungrateful, tippling, drunken, revengeful defrauder of creditors any longer. Go.’

She opened the door and pointed.

‘I shall go to my friends,’ he repeated. ‘Most powerful friends. Grapes Tavern—Jermyn Street. I shall have plenty of money. I shall go back to the City and open another shop. You may go on taking the money of the woman—the woman——’

His wife slammed the door in his face. Muttering and

grumbling, he descended the stairs and made his way to Jermyn Street, where he called for another tankard to cool his brain. He then endeavoured to explain to Mr. Pinder what had happened, but, finding words evasive and difficult to catch, he took a third tankard, which failed to remove his difficulties—even increasing them. He therefore gave up the struggle and resigned himself to a prolonged slumber, which carried him past the dinner-hour and quite through the afternoon.

That night he made no attempt to return to his wife's lodgings. In the morning, somewhat terrified at the acceptance of her injunctions, and afraid that something might have happened to her husband, the good woman made her way to the Grapes in Jermyn Street. Here she learned from the pot-boy that her husband had slept in the house, and was at that moment in the bar, taking his morning draught.

‘Ho!’ he said. ‘You have come to beg my forgiveness? You are going to entreat me to return, are you?’

‘Not at all. I came only to find out if you had fallen down and been killed in a drunken fit.’

‘In that case, you may go back again,’ he replied with dignity. ‘I shall stay here. I am provided—here—with all I want. I have a bed and a bedroom; I have the run of all the drinks; I don’t want your ninepence. My powerful friends will now provide me with everything.’

‘What friends, pray, are they?’

As she spoke, the landlord, Mr. Pinder, appeared.

‘That’s one of my new friends,’ said her husband.

The woman looked at the new-comer. She saw a white-faced, somewhat fat man, with cunning eyes close together.

‘Sir,’ she said, ‘is it true that you have promised to

give my husband board and lodging and as much drink as he calls for?"

'It is true, madam, that these things are provided for him by a friend. Not by myself. His friend, be assured, will take the greatest care of him.'

'If his friend encourages my husband to become like a helpless hog every day, it is not the part of a true friend. That is all I have to say. What has my husband to do for it? Look at him! What can he do?'

'All I have to do,' her husband explained, 'is to hold my tongue until I am told to speak.'

'A simple condition,' said Mr. Pinder. 'What your husband says is quite true. But his friend is a most benevolent person.'

'There is something mysterious in it. Pray, sir, what services has my husband rendered to this friend, that he should be paid so liberally for silence?'

'It is a question, madam, that I have asked myself, in vain.'

Then the good woman understood that this man was also concerned in the mystery, and knew what was intended. It needed not the quickness and the suspicion common to the feminine mind for her to understand that the crafty and meaning face betrayed the knowledge of what was meant; but she was careful not to express her conclusions.

'Well, sir,' she said, 'you might perhaps tell your friend——'

'Not my friend, madam.'

'The gentleman, then, who provides all these things for my husband, that it would be far better to find him work to do than to help him to sit all day drinking.'

‘Madam, it is not for me to interfere with the benevolence of this gentleman.’

‘I shall keep silence,’ her husband interposed, ‘as long as it pleases me. When I can revenge myself upon the lady—the lady in question—Mr. Pinder knows—I shall break silence. Woman, you can go!’

So Mrs. Fulton left him. After all, she had little fear about his powers of annoyance; and he was happy in the way that he most desired—namely, that he had no work to do and that he had plenty of drink. What more could such a man desire?

She thought, however, that she ought to tell Mrs. Weyland what had happened.

‘Madam,’ she said, having made her report, ‘there is something here that I do not understand. Who is the gentleman that provides everything for my husband on the simple condition that he keeps silence? Why does he behave with so much benevolence?’

‘Perhaps I could guess.’

‘Why should Fulton be paid for silence? What harm could the poor man do if he shouted everything from the housetop?’

‘I think, Mrs. Fulton, that I could tell you who is the powerful friend and what he designs.’

‘To begin with, my husband could not shout; he is past shouting. He cannot any longer tell a story so as to make himself understood. In a few weeks, or days, he will not be able to speak at all; he will be a mumbling idiot.’

‘That,’ said Isabel, ‘is a most comfortable reflection, if we were sure of it. I cannot tell you everything, because other people besides myself are concerned; but I see one thing which may explain matters. My story is now known to certain persons who intend getting money from me in

return, they pretend, for your husband's silence. I do not know yet if I shall have to give them money or not. They are unscrupulous persons. The man Pinder, I doubt not, is one of the conspirators. Your husband cannot by himself spread abroad the story; he is, however, an instrument. They keep him under their eyes; he is not allowed to go anywhere, so as to make a show in my eyes of buying his silence. If he were to speak, there would be no possible pretext for getting money from me. He cannot speak, you say. They must pretend that he can. If I refuse this money they ask, they would first make a pretence that your husband was desperate; if that failed, out of revenge they would probably spread abroad the story. They would then turn your husband into the street.'

'Alas, madam! it is a very wicked world.'

'It is indeed, Mrs. Fulton. You yourself have not found it a world full of flowers and music and soft things. You were only poor, and you were therefore left alone. It is better to be poor than rich.'

'Nay, madam, but not to be miserably poor. And if one is rich, one can make other people happy.'

'A rich woman is the prey of every adventurer, of every rogue, of every person who would get her money if he could.' Isabel sighed. 'And if they find a handle, they will use it for a means of extorting money. You know what I did, Mrs. Fulton. The sin is on my conscience. I would make atonement if I could; I would pay that debt over and over again if that would suffice. But it will not. These men will not allow it to suffice. The story which I would willingly forget, and, oh! so willingly cause to be forgotten if I could, these men will keep alive if they can. Oh, sometimes I declare to myself that I will face anything—anything that their malice can devise—but that

I will give them nothing ; and at other times I feel as if no price could be paid too high for silence, and I pray, oh, I pray, “ Lord, remember not past years ! ” ’

She buried her face in her hands.

‘ Madam,’ said Mrs. Fulton, ‘ it is not good for a woman to stand alone in the world. Lay the case before someone—some good lawyer, if you know such an one.’

‘ If I know such an one. But I am ashamed.’

‘ Yes, but lawyers do not talk. Find such an one, madam, I entreat you, and lay the whole case before him. You will be supported ; you will be relieved ; oh, you will be so much happier. Find such a man and tell him all.’

CHAPTER XV

DUST, ASHES, AND AMAZEMENT

ISABEL sat alone all that afternoon, trying to see her way clear. She was afraid. If you think of it, the exaggeration of our own importance may become a wholesome incentive to virtue. In fact, with many of us it is the chief incentive. We are so important that we must not be sinners. Now, had the whole story of the young widow, driven to despair by her duns, been noised all over the town, she would probably have been little the worse. A day's talk, a day's scandal, a little staring at the heroine of the story, a sneer here, a sigh there, a whisper behind a fan, and the thing would have been over. But Isabel was afraid. She pictured the mocking laughter of the world, the joy of the tea-tables, the alienation of her friends, the finger of scorn, the ruin of her reputation—that beautiful bubble so easily pricked, so ready to collapse—and she was afraid.

When money is demanded as the price of silence, it is well to consider what might happen if that money is refused. In the case of Isabel, what had she to expect? The talk of a poor drunken creature who could hardly articulate, and was growing daily more incapable of speech; his confused babble—that is to say, among butlers and valets, coachmen and lackeys; the scandal of the lady's-maid over

her mistress's toilette; the whispers of the ladies among each other; the talk of Pinder, the landlord of the Grapes; the innuendoes and suggestions of her brother-in-law. The last-named she could silence, and he was the only important witness; she could silence him by the simple withdrawal of her support, when he would have to creep back to the solitude of his empty house in the country. In a word, there was no real reason for her terror except one—a reason which she resolutely refused to acknowledge to herself, though conscious of its existence—the thought that the history would become known to the man whose good opinion she now desired more than anything else in the world. For the rest, they might talk or they might be silent; she need not fear or care what they said or what they did; at the worst there might be a rumour—an ugly rumour—but no more.

This view, however, was too sensible for a woman in her hysterical condition to accept. She could not put it into words; it kept dancing before her eyes like a Will-o'-the-wisp, a Jack-a-Lantern—it flickered and disappeared. She was afraid of everybody: of the bankrupt first, of her brother-in-law, of the lackeys. His lordship had already placed in Oliver's hands a statement of the case, on the pretence of asking advice; perhaps he had guessed the truth. How could she endure that he should learn it? Her acquaintance with him had become an intimate friendship; he was never tired of calling at the house; he seemed always happy in her society; he amused and tried to please her; she showed that he could please her, and did please her; she thought that there wanted only one word—one little word, one decisive word—to be said, and that the time was nearly come for him to say that word, to which she had the answer ready. Hitherto she had

been in no hurry; the time of wooing, as every woman knows, is far more pleasant than the time of surrender—just as the month of May, with the flowers of spring, is far more pleasant than the month of July, with the flowers of summer. At this juncture, however, she repented that she had not heard that word and given that answer, and made him hers before this trouble arose.

There was, alas! to be much more trouble. What had already happened was but the beginning.

Oliver called in the evening. By this time Isabel had worked up a very fine headache: she begged him to take care of Alice, and to amuse her. For her own part, she sat alone by the open window looking out upon St. James's Square.

It was at the end of the month of August; the day had been close and hot, with a gray sky, no sunshine, and no wind. Thunder and lightning were in the air; the storm was ready to burst; the gray clouds had become black; the evening was very dark.

When lightning is ready to flash about the world, strange things happen: the man in the street finds himself able to hear what is said in the houses, though doors and windows are closed; whispers a long way off will be heard as though they were loud voices close at hand. It is not, therefore, strange that Isabel overheard, without the least intention of listening, a conversation carried on in low voices some seventy or a hundred feet away, beside the fountain in the midst of the square. There were no other voices; the square was silent; there were no footsteps in it; on such an evening, with an impending storm, people keep at home. The voices were those of her friend Oliver and her companion Alice.

‘I tell you, Alice,’ said Oliver, ‘that I love you.

Alice, I love you—only you—you, with all my heart and all my soul—only you.’

Isabel sat up and gazed out into the darkness, and her heart fell within her as heavy as lead. For a few moments there was no reply; there was no other sound from the great open square than the plashing of the fountain.

Then Alice spoke. Oh! she knew the soft and murmurous voice. But they were words of loyalty.

‘Sir,’ she said, ‘you must not say such things. You must not. Indeed, sir, if you talk in that manner I cannot stay and listen. Such talk is not worthy of you. What would my lady say or think?’

‘Alice!’ It was as if he took her hand.

‘No!’ It was as if she pushed it away. ‘Oh, Mr. Macnamara! you have told me over and over again that you are bound by every tie of gratitude to madam.’

‘It is true. By every tie. What then?’

‘And so am I. Believe me, sir, I would rather cut off my right hand than offend or injure madam. She is an angel of goodness.’

Isabel strained her ears at the open window. Alice was loyal—was loyal. And Oliver? What was he?

‘She is—she is,’ he said. ‘I acknowledge it. She is all that you say. She is an angel of goodness, Alice. Yet, Alice, I think of you all day long.’

‘You must think of me no longer. Besides, who am I that you should think of me? My father is a bankrupt—and worse; he leads a shameful life; he drinks and begs. He left us without help, and has never tried to find work. And my mother is supported by madam’s charity. You ought to look higher, Mr. Macnamara. You are a gentleman.’

‘I want nothing higher, Alice. I want you.’

‘And there is another thing: madam, oh, I am quite sure—madam thinks about you.’

Isabel groaned with shame. It was true—but that Alice should have perceived it!

‘Thinks about me?’

‘In one way, I mean. You must understand, Mr. Macnamara. Why, she is still young; she is beautiful; she is charming; she is full of kindness—cannot you understand?’

‘Alice, I can think of nothing but you.’

This was all the conversation. Perhaps the wind changed; perhaps other things interfered; Isabel heard no more.

She had heard enough; the dream of a second love, on which she had built so many hopes, was shattered. Oliver would always think of Alice—of Alice—of nothing in the world but Alice. What was the use of being an angel of goodness—Isabel laughed to herself—an angel of goodness, if so simple a thing as love was denied?

What had Mrs. Brymer said? That the girl would do her a mischief. Oh, prophetess! Oh, wise woman! How did she know? A mischief indeed—yet through no fault of the girl’s.

Some women—smaller women—would have reproached the girl; would have seen some lightness or insincerity, some deep design, in her conduct; would have found some excuse for driving her away. Isabel did not. She knew very well that the charms of seven-and-twenty cannot rival those of eighteen, especially with a face all loveliness and sweetness, such as that of the girl Alice.

She still sat at the window, the room in darkness, thinking over this unexpected misfortune. Nothing could be done; there was no way out of it; she could no longer

think of a man whose thoughts would always be with another; the man must marry Alice; she must forget her dream; she must give up the hopes which had made her happy; there was no happiness for her; Alice had done her a mischief; Mrs. Brymer was right. And so over and over again she repeated to herself the same words, brooding over the same thoughts.

A little later Alice came into the room, but alone.

‘Madam, you are sitting in the dark! Where are the servants? Will you choose to have candles?’

‘Presently, Alice. One pair only. I do not want to read.’

Her voice was constrained.

‘You have a headache, dear madam. Will you not go to bed? Shall I call your maid? May I undress you myself? Let me do something for you, madam.’

‘No, Alice, no. Send for candles only. Do you go to bed. Tell my maid that I shall not want her this evening. I think that we shall have thunder before long. So—good-night, good-night, my child.’

Presently she heard the servants locking up the house and going to bed; but still she sat on at the open window, the candles on a table beside her, alone with the wreckage and the ruins of her shattered hopes.

She was in no hurry to go to her own room. The storm was working up; it would soon burst over her head; flashes of distant lightning began to light up the square, with low grumblings of thunder. She sat watching the square bursting into light for a moment, and then falling back into darkness impenetrable.

Suddenly, without any reason; with no warning, having heard nothing that could terrify her, and being entirely unsuspecting of what might happen—the thing was

farthest of any from her thoughts—she fell into a sudden and a deadly terror. She clutched the arms of her chair; she leaned forward, peering into the twilight of the room, imperfectly lit by her two candles; her limbs shook; her hands trembled; her cheek turned pale. It was a large room, covered with a thick carpet on which footsteps were not heard; and it was in a kind of twilight, with the two candles in one corner. She tried to reassure herself: there was nothing. Why—why was she seized by this strange and unreasonable terror?

Then the storm burst overhead. The lightnings played above the square; the thunder crashed and rolled; the room sprang into light; and—oh, merciful heavens! what was that?

Another flash lit up the room, and she saw before her the dead man—the dead man—the black man—the horrible negro whom she had married! He stood in the room, facing her, the big black man, with eyes that the lightning turned to fire, and teeth which the lightning turned into the white jaws of a tiger.

Another and a third flash. The dead man drew nearer. He stooped towards her; he put out his black hands; he made as if he would take her in his arms.

Then Isabel, catching at the arm of her chair, rose to her feet.

‘Speak!’ she cried. ‘Speak! oh, merciful God! speak! In the name of Heaven, why have you risen from the dead? What do you want with me?’

The dead man made no reply, but he took a step nearer in an awful silence.

‘Speak!’ Isabel cried again. ‘Why—why—why do you come from the grave to torment me?’

‘Why,’ said the voice from the grave, with a horrible

chuckle—can a dead man laugh?—‘you are my wife. You were married to me in Newgate when I was lying cast for death.’

‘Why, he speaks! Tell me—tell me—what you want.’

‘Madam, you thought I was to be hanged a-Monday. You were wrong. Because, you see’—again he chuckled, with the horrid clicking in the throat which only the black man can do—‘I was not hanged. They gave me a respite, and sent me to Virginia—to the plantations. I’ve just come from the plantations. Ho! ho! And I’ve found you out. Oh yes—cluck! cluck! cluck!’

‘Oh, he is alive! Good heavens, he is alive!’

‘I’ve been alive ever since you married me. It isn’t likely—is it?—that I should be dead now just as I’ve found my wife, and just as I’m going to enjoy my wedding.’

‘You have found me? Have you been looking for me?’

‘Not knowing what might happen, I took your name from the parson on our wedding-day—our wedding-day. When I came home from the plantations—last week it was—I said to myself: “There’s my lovely dainty wife; I must go to see her. She will take care that I shall not want for anything. She’ll be very kind to her husband, though he is but a man of colour. Besides, all that she has is mine—all mine, all mine. A pretty little house it is—oh yes!—cluck! cluck!”

Isabel shuddered.

‘Oh,’ she cried, ‘this is terrible! it is horrible! Oh, what shall I do?’

‘So I found out where you live. How did I do that? Perhaps I sent a messenger to ask about the tavern where the servants go. They know everybody. Here I am!

Here I am at last, after two years and more. You are glad to see your husband, pretty ?

‘How did you get in? The servants have been in bed for an hour and more, and the house is locked up.’

‘Don’t you never ask how I got in, not if you care for your husband. Only show me, if you can, the house in London that can keep me out, with all its bars and shutters, if I want to get in. Now, my lady, I am here, and I shall come and go every night if I like, and I shall do what I please in my own house.’

Isabel began to recover. She had to do with a live man, not a spectre. The thought gave her a little courage.

‘You are here,’ she said. ‘Dare to attempt any kind of violence or robbery, and I shall ring all the bells and call my people. Husband or not, you shall be seized and carried to Bow Street for a housebreaker. If you were not hanged before, you shall be hanged then. Shall I ring?’

The man hesitated. There was light enough in the room to show him the face of a determined woman. Before such a face the children of Ham quail.

‘If you ring there will be murder,’ he said. ‘I will murder everybody before I am taken. I am thirsty. Give me something to drink.’

‘I shall give you nothing to drink.’

‘That’s the way you mean to take it, is it? Oh, you’ll disobey your husband, will you? Some women have been murdered for less. In my country we kill a woman who disobeys. We kill her by slow degrees: we stick red-hot skewers in her. But don’t be afraid. You will be more useful to me alive than dead. You can say what you like.

I don't mind. You're my wife, when all is said. Cluck ! cluck ! cluck !

She laid her hand on a dagger, an old weapon that hung behind on the wall with certain ancient things. 'I have this knife. If you attempt, I say, any kind of robbery or violence, I will first ring up my people ; and if they do not come, I can stab myself—and I will. Remember that. I will, unless I can rid myself some other way of your loathsome presence.'

He laughed, but low and in a hoarse whisper, with some repression of his horrible cluck.

'That little knife? What can you do with a thing like that. But don't be afraid, I say—don't be afraid. You will be far more useful to me alive than dead.'

The man, a shadowy figure by the light of the candles, and only lit up by the flashes of lightning, looked threatening and hideous—like a horrible figure conjured up by a fevered dream. Isabel clutched her dagger and kept her eyes steadily fixed upon him. She meant what she said. At the least attempt at violence she would use that dagger.

'I said to myself,' he explained, 'all the way across the Atlantic, that I had a wife at home: I only had to go to her for shelter and for lodging, not to speak of drink. And you offer your husband nothing.'

'I am not going to give you drink, either now, or at any other time.'

'Suppose I go to these fine houses and your great friends, and say, "Look at me. I am the husband of Mrs. Weyland of St. James's Square."'

Her heart sank low. Good heavens! Was the whole of her sin to be blazoned forth to the wide world by two wretched men? But she answered with courage: 'You

dare not. You know that you dare not.' She knew not what she meant, except that the man had been sentenced for something quite infamous.

'Why not?' he replied. 'Answer me that. Why not?'

She perceived that her arrow had gone home. He dared not. But she made no reply.

'Why don't I kill you where you stand? I ought to, Most men would have killed you.'

'Because you dare not,' she replied again.

He remained at a distance of four or five feet, being so big and tall that he stood over her. The man had expected submission and terror. He found the assumption, at least, of fearlessness. And there was the bright dagger in her hand. He changed his tone.

'Look you,' he said. 'I want money. Never mind about the drink. I want money. I have landed without money. If I go into the places where they know me, I shall be—but never mind. Give me some money and let me go.'

'How long will the money last you? If you think that you will get whatever you ask you will be mistaken.'

'How much are you going to give me? I'm going to lie snug. I know a place where I can lie quite snug. No one will find me there. And I'm going to live upon you.'

'How do you know that I shall give you any money?'

'You must. You are Mistress Truxo. If you refuse to give me money, I can claim all your property. Yes—your fine house and your fortune, whatever it is: I don't know that I shall not. Why should you be living on the fat of the land, and me, your lawful husband, be made to beg his bread from you? Answer me that.'

'Man, if you could claim my property, you would. That is quite certain. You do not because you dare not.'

‘I will show you whether I dare or not,’ he said. ‘Come, give me the money and let me go.’

Isabel took out her purse, which contained about fifteen guineas. The man snatched it out of her hands. ‘That will do,’ he said, weighing it in his hand, ‘for a beginning.’

‘You have got your money,’ said Isabel. ‘Now you can go. I shall think over what I can do for you. Tell me, however, where I can find you—where I can send you more money. You do not want to come here like a house-breaker I suppose. It is dangerous if my footmen are about.’

‘How many footmen have you got? I’m not afraid of half a dozen.’

‘They will not try to take you prisoner; they will kill you with swords. They are armed for the protection of the house.’

The man grumbled and cursed, but not loudly.

‘Well, I am to be found at the White Dog, Great Hermitage Street, beyond the Tower.’

‘The White Dog, Great Hermitage Street, beyond the Tower. I shall remember. You have got fifteen guineas. That should last you fifteen weeks at least.’

‘I don’t know how long it will last. When it is done you will have to find more. I shall send a messenger from the White Dog. You will know he comes from me, and you can give him the money safely.’

‘You had better go,’ said Isabel. ‘You have now got all I shall give you. I shall consider what to do for the future. Go away at once.’

‘Yes, I’ll go. I’ve let you know that I’m not dead at all, but alive. I intend to live upon you. Why not? All that you’ve got is mine. Here’s fifteen guineas to begin with. It is not much when a man has to entertain his

friends, but it's something. Well, I'll go. Shall I have a kiss before parting?'

Isabel grasped the dagger more tightly.

'If you dare to touch me, Black Beast, I will kill you. If I must kill you first, I will kill myself afterwards.'

'I can't afford to let you kill yourself, madam, else I would take a kiss whether you liked it or not. That can wait, I dare say. Before long I shall be coming to live in this fine house as your husband, for all the world to see. For to-night, however, I am going back to the White Dog in Great Hermitage Street. There's fine company in Great Hermitage Street, but they don't know that I've just come back from the plantations. Oho! they don't know—cluck!'

'Oh, go! go! go! Get out of the house!'

'I am going. Good-night, my doxy dear; good-night, Mrs. Adolphus Truxo.'

So saying, he disappeared noiselessly, as he had come.

The lightning had ceased, and the rolling of the thunder was now a long way off; outside a heavy shower was pouring down. To Isabel the shower seemed like the tears of remorse for the thing which had found her out. She sat in her chair nearly all the night. It was daylight when she sought her own room. But there was no sleep for her; life was turned to dust and ashes, and her tranquillity to amazement and terror.

CHAPTER XVI

CONFESSION

THE day broke upon the most miserable woman in the whole of the vast City of London, which is so full of men and women, and therefore of misery. All together—not one now and then, after a decent interval between each for the patient to recover, but all together—with one consent, with simultaneous happening, just as his miseries fell upon Job, so Isabel's sins found her out and Isabel's punishment began. The man whose claim, which she believed to be just, she had transferred to another, to a man who could never pay it—who she knew very well could never pay it—had found her out, and was reported to be clamouring for revenge. The wretched instrument of her dishonesty, the man she thought and believed to have been dead a long time, was not dead at all, but alive, and proposing to live upon her, and even to take over all her property as his own. Her very brother-in-law was conspiring to get money from her on pretence of giving it to the drunken bankrupt. The dream that promised her a renewal of happiness, love, and protection was shattered ; she was threatened with public exposure. Was ever woman, lone and unprotected, so beset with dangers from every quarter, and with consequences so fatal of her follies and extravagances ? Whichever way she looked abroad, there were

black clouds with the patter of rain, the breath of cold wind, and the growling of thunders.

Visitors came to her that day, and each in turn brought before her fresh dangers of the situation ; one more, the last, brought her some promise of relief.

The first was Mr. Pinder. He sent up his name modestly : ‘ Would her ladyship see him, formerly valet to Lord Stratherrick, on a matter of some importance ? ’

He entered with a low, cringing bow and hanging hands, after the manner of his kind. His appearance did not inspire confidence—his face was too fat and too white, his eyes too close together ; but his manner was deferential.

‘ You come,’ said Isabel, ‘ from Lord Stratherrick ? ’

‘ With submission, madam,’ he made answer, in a soft, low voice, as if he was anxious not to be heard outside the room. ‘ I come on business partly connected with his lordship, but I have no longer the honour to serve him. I am now the landlord of the Grapes Tavern, Jermyn Street, at your service.’

‘ Pray, have I anything to do with the Grapes Tavern ? ’

‘ Your ladyship knows something, I believe’—he dropped his voice to a whisper—‘ concerning one Fulton, formerly of Ludgate Hill.’ Isabel made a sign of disgust. ‘ Your ladyship is quite right. I understand what you would say. The man is beneath your consideration except in one particular—except in one particular—one particular. He is, saving your ladyship’s presence, nothing better than a drunken hog.’

‘ What do you want with me ? Why do you whisper ? ’ Isabel turned her shoulder from him and put up her fan.

‘ Do you mean that I have secrets with such a person ? ’

‘ Madam, it appears that the man Fulton possesses, or thinks that he possesses, knowledge of some importance to

your ladyship—knowledge which, in fact, should be kept from the world. I say that he thinks or pretends to have such knowledge. In order to keep him from talking, his lordship, who is always thinking of others for their own good, has asked me to allow this man the run of his food and drink—as much drink, especially, as he likes to call for—’tis a thirsty soul!—on condition of silence.’

‘Well, you say that Lord Stratherrick has given you this order. It concerns him, not me. You have only to carry it out. Pray, why do you bring this news to me?’

Mr. Pinder disregarded the question and proceeded with his story.

‘Your ladyship most generously provides for this man’s wife and daughter. The wife lives in lodgings paid for by you and on your bounty. Now, the man, owing to some disagreement with his wife, has been turned by her out of doors. I have, therefore, still by his lordship’s orders, provided him with a bed. He now lives entirely at the Grapes. He begins to drink as soon as he gets up, quite early in the morning, and he drinks all day long, except in the afternoon, when he lies in a drunken sleep. In the evening he is carried upstairs to bed. I assure your ladyship that he is kept all day long in perfect silence, because his tongue is tied and his brain muddled with drink. So long as he continues with me your ladyship is in safety. For even if he wished to talk he cannot, except when he is partly sober, which is only in the early morning, if, indeed, he can be called sober even then.’

‘What is all this to me? Good Heaven! what is it to me? Have I ordered this treatment of the man? Why do you come to me?’

‘I come, madam, because all this has been done in your

interest; I would not otherwise press the matter. But your ladyship knows the private circumstances—the straitened means—of Lord Stratherrick. As his confidential servant, I may also venture to say that I know these circumstances. His lordship ordered this measure of procedure in the treatment of the man Fulton, and he is entirely responsible for the money, not your ladyship at all. You knew nothing, until I told you, about the present condition of this man and his entertainment at the Grapes—that I do not deny.’

‘Then let Lord Stratherrick pay the money, and have done with it.’

‘With respect, madam, he cannot pay the money. He has nothing, except what your ladyship gives him. This man’s keep is mounting rapidly. It will soon become a very long bill. I would explain that he drinks every day at least one tankard of small ale in the morning to clear his brain; a pint of wine at ten o’clock; another at about noon; more small ale with his dinner; a bottle of port after his dinner; and during the rest of the day punch. He is a mere cask for drink.’

‘I do not want the particulars of your bill.’ Isabel waved her hand impatiently. ‘I care nothing about the drunken wretch. If that is all you have to say, you can go.’

‘If his lordship receives money on this account from you, he will certainly’—he coughed gently—‘certainly—with submission, madam—certainly spend it all at the cockpit or the gaming-table. My lord has a most generous heart, and a most kindly disposition, but where the gaming-table is concerned, he forgets—if I may be permitted, as his servant, to say so—the meaning of debts, or of money due to other purposes. In plain words,

madam, as no doubt you are well aware, his lordship is not to be trusted with money.'

'Understand, sir, that I am not going to discuss my lord's character with you.'

'Madam, it is in your own interest that I have ventured to speak.'

'Very well, be it so. Meantime, I am sick of hearing that this drunken beast threatens me. Let him do his worst, then he will have no more excuse for demanding money; nor will you; nor will Lord Stratherrick. As to your bill, let his lordship pay it. You may all do your worst, then I shall be no more troubled with you, or the Grapes Tavern, or any of your low company of gamblers and drunkards and lackeys. You can go.'

Mr. Pinder made no reply; he bowed with hanging hands as before, and he retired. It is not the part of a good valet to reply, or to show any resentment, whatever may be said. He retired, but he was not ill pleased with the result of his interview; ladies in straits, he knew, are always ready to buy themselves out; they talk bravely, but they act cowardly. Mrs. Weyland was not different from other persons of her sex: she would act cowardly. His bill would be paid, and it would be a very large bill indeed.

Isabel, however, dismissed this difficulty for a time. Her thoughts went back to the more important and the more threatening danger—to the negro, Mr. Adolphus Truxo. He was in England; he was back again in London; he had returned from the plantations. Had he received a pardon, then? If so, on what account? He was claiming his rights as a husband over her property. Suppose he were to take all; suppose he were to take the house and her fortune—everything? He was her husband; he might do

this. She knew enough of the law to be aware that he had a legal right to everything ; he was entitled to take all ; he seemed to know that he could do it. Why, in the face of this danger the business of Mr. Fulton and his possible revelations at the Grapes Tavern was of very small importance indeed.

Presently she saw, walking along the south side of the Square, a woman of the baser sort. She could hardly be lower. There are depths of human misery of which no one knows anything. This woman was doubtless removed from these lowest depths, which no one has fathomed, but it could not be by many steps. She wore a kind of nightcap, torn and dirty ; her dress consisted of a single garment, which was a thick skirt of linsey-woolsey, stained and coloured by the exposure of many years to every kind of abomination ; above the skirt she wore stays of black leather—black, that is, by long exposure, and by being worn day and night ; a large kind of shawl covered her shoulders and her arms ; her hair, unkempt, hung down in rats'-tails ; one of her eyes was blackened. Never before had such a figure been seen in St. James's Square. Instinctively, Isabel connected her with the White Dog of Great Hermitage Street. There was no reason whatever for such a connection—there was even nothing to suggest it, but Isabel jumped instinctively to the conclusion that this woman was the negro's messenger, and her conclusion, as is often the case with feminine logic, was true.

The woman stopped people and asked questions of them. At last it appeared as if she got an answer, for she made her way straight to the house. Isabel, at the window, saw her and trembled. She felt sick. It was already a message from Wapping—she was now quite certain—demanding more money. And this was to go on. She

understood very well what would happen : a free hand and generosity among the sailors and riverside folk on the part of the man, and day after day a demand for more money —always more money.

A footman brought up the message. It was a greasy, discoloured paper, on which was written : ‘I want munny. Give it to barrer.’

Isabel read the note. She put a brave face on the matter.

‘Tell this poor woman,’ she said, ‘that an answer will be sent. I shall consider whether I may extend her charity. But there is nothing more. If she persists in waiting, put her out into the street.’

From the hall there presently arose sounds of an altercation : a woman’s voice rose shrill and angry ; it was answered by a man’s voice, quiet and resolute. Presently there was a shriek, and she saw the woman running down the steps with extended arms and with greater velocity and less dignity of deportment than is consistent with voluntary departure. She stood upon the pavement for a few moments muttering and cursing, and then she turned and went on her way.

More ‘munny.’ Yes, he would want more money every day. Isabel had visions of flight from the country. Life would be intolerable in the power of this creature. In her darkness she could see nothing possible except flight.

While she was thus grovelling in mere despair, Lord Stratherrick came. His face was made up so as to suggest the deepest sympathy and pity. It was like the face of a mute trying to be more conscientious than his fellows at a funeral. The acting was overdone.

‘My dear Isabel,’ he said, pressing her hand and sinking

into a chair, 'I am come to annoy you. But I must—I must—I have no choice. I am most sorry, I assure you. It is about that wretched man Fulton.'

'Oh, my lord! I have the case of that person clear, and I am resolved what to do.'

'And you will do—what?'

'Nothing—nothing at all.'

'You will do nothing? My dear Isabel, are you in your senses? Are you aware——'

'I shall do just nothing at all. Other things have happened since you were here last. They are things of far greater importance. If the man likes, he may tell his tale all the town over. He will do me no harm—none, compared with what these other things . . .'

Her voice dropped. She hung her head.

'But, Isabel'—all the sympathy and pity went out of his face: a sudden consternation took their place—'I know not what you mean. What has happened? Remember, considerable expense has been incurred. The man has been taken in at a most respectable tavern, where he is allowed whatever he chooses to call for.'

'It was by your orders, not mine. I was not consulted.'

'I acted for you, on your behalf, in your interests.'

'You acted on your own responsibility.'

'But I have already spoken with the man about the money due to him. The thing is practically arranged.'

'There is nothing due to him. I will give him nothing. Do you hear?'

'Very good. The man must therefore be turned into the street. The consequences, Isabel, will, I fear, prove very serious.'

'In the street he can say what he likes. But the first

consequence will be that he will have to go back to his wife and make submission.'

'Perhaps. After doing all the mischief he can. Consider, Isabel. A family scandal! Think of me!'

Isabel laughed contemptuously.

'I have thought of you. I will, if you please, send him a message to the effect that if he causes a family scandal to your annoyance—though I should think that you were hardened to family scandals—his wife shall not help him.'

Lord Stratherrick was visibly disconcerted.

'Well, Isabel,' he said, after a little consideration, 'I cannot, of course, force you to look at the thing from a sensible point of view. I thought I had planned this business so as to secure you from all further trouble. A refuge or asylum in a tavern for this poor man—a place where he might forget his past miseries in cheerful company, where he could drink his fill—with a sum of money for compensation and for maintenance.'

'I have already told you that I owe him nothing; he lost nothing by me.'

'I have worked it out, entirely in your interest, and on a most moderate scale. Counting everything, the man would, I am sure, be satisfied with the sum of £600, or £750 at the utmost. There is, you see, the bankruptcy——'

'You need not give me the details. I shall not give him that or any other sum of money.'

'Isabel, I warn you most solemnly.'

'Very good; I have received your warning. Pray, what security have you that he would remain silent when the money was spent?'

'I should take precautions. You may trust me for taking all necessary precautions to prevent his talking.'

‘And what security should I have that Lord Stratherrick would give the man that money?’

‘Isabel! Really—if this suggestion came from a man! Have you, then, no reliance at all on my honour?’

‘My lord, remember the past—your own past, not mine.’

Lord Stratherrick made no reply. There had been passages in his past life which were not pleasant to remember; there had been passages in connection with Isabel herself in which certain moneys received by him on trust in order to make certain payments had disappeared.

‘The only thing that you propose,’ she said, ‘is to keep him at the tavern, where, it appears, he gets drunk every day. Perhaps I might undertake to pay something moderate on account of debt already incurred on that account.’ You observe that Pinder was right: the lady, in spite of brave words, was preparing for a partial surrender. ‘Your former valet has been here.’

‘Pinder has been here? Pinder? What did Pinder say? Pinder has been to see you?’ Lord Stratherrick sat up visibly annoyed and even distressed by this breach of confidence on the part of Pinder. ‘My dear Isabel, Pinder is a scoundrel! Pinder is a good servant, but a man of no principle and no truth. So Pinder has been behind my back! And I am his oldest friend and benefactor. I took Pinder out of the gutter. Where is gratitude? And what did Pinder want?’

‘He wanted payment. He said that you ordered the reception of the man, but that you could not be depended on for payment of his bill for drink and lodging. He wanted me to undertake the payment of that bill. Pinder acted as such men always do act—entirely for himself. So

long as he can make out as large a bill as possible and look to me for payment, what else concerns him?’

‘Pinder! Pinder did this! And I have made that man’s fortune! Pinder! Is there gratitude anywhere in the human breast?’

‘Pinder is of opinion that if I gave you the money it would get lost on the way. Between this house and the Grapes, somewhere or other, there is, I believe, a cock-pit.’

‘Pinder! I am surprised, I own, at Pinder.’

‘And now, my lord, I think we have talked enough upon an extremely disagreeable subject.’

His lordship rose and departed. But as he went he murmured, as one beyond measure astonished:

‘Pinder! Pinder!’

She received one more visitor—Oliver. He came in the afternoon. At the sight of him Isabel remembered Mrs. Fulton’s advice: ‘Find a lawyer. Tell him everything.’ Why should she not tell everything to this lawyer? Only the day before it would have been impossible. Now, however, the reasons which made it impossible had disappeared; the conversation she had heard shattered those reasons; it was no longer necessary for her to guard herself from the loss of his belief—if it really existed—in her virtue. ‘An angel of goodness’? Not when he found out that her real name was Mrs. Truxo. She could no longer go on thinking by herself alone over possible dangers which had become like mountainous waves threatening to overwhelm her. She resolved, therefore, suddenly and without further hesitation, upon telling Oliver everything. Had she waited, had she considered, she might have changed her mind, and then, indeed, swift ruin, despair, wreck, loss of everything, might have fallen upon her.

‘Mr. Macnamara,’ she said, the tears coming into her eyes, ‘I am in deadly need of a friend.’

‘Madam, can you doubt that you have a friend in me? I may be of no use to you; but if there is any way . . . tell me only what I can do for you.’ He kissed her hand and stood before her, his kindly face filled with concern on her behalf and with eagerness to help her. ‘But, dear madam, I trust it is nothing serious.’

‘It is very serious indeed. It could hardly be more serious. Oh, I am the most miserable woman in the whole world! You will despise me as much as I despise myself.’

‘It is impossible, dear madam, for me to regard you with anything but the deepest respect. Tell me all. Let me entreat you to hide nothing if by telling me you make it possible for me to help you.’

She forced herself to tell him all. With burning cheeks aflame with shame she concealed nothing. He knew already that she came to the King’s Bench in order to marry a prisoner on the Poor side, who would thereby be made a prisoner for life; it had been his own fate very nearly.

‘I understand,’ he said presently, relieving her of further confessions. ‘You went elsewhere to carry out your intention. I had not suspected it, nor, indeed, had I ever thought about it. You left the King’s Bench and you went to Newgate, after leaving me, and you there married a man—any man—the first man who presented himself—what did it matter whether he was a black or not?—and the black was not hanged at all. Really, the case is curious and interesting! By no means hopeless.’ This he added in order to cheer her a little, because it appeared in reality to be a very black case indeed. ‘The man is back again, oh! and claiming rights! Yes; and the

other man, the bankrupt, is pretending that the non-payment of a debt before it was due was the cause of his failure, and is threatening all kinds of things.' He stopped, considering. 'Madam,' he continued, after a pause, 'I think there may be a way out of this trouble.'

'Oh! What way out? What way can there be?'

'I received a case the other day for an opinion. It looks now as if it was your own case. It put a question. Suppose such a transference of debt, was the woman liable for those debts if she received money after the husband's death? Of course she is not liable.'

'That case was sent to you by my brother-in-law.'

'I suspected something of the kind at once. Why did he send it to me? But that matters nothing,' he added hastily, because he thought that he perceived the reason. 'Well, madam, this fellow who has returned is liable for the debt; he is also the master of all your fortune.'

'Yet you say that there is a way out of it?'

'I think it is highly probable. But we must move cautiously. To begin with, the man has returned from the plantations. What does that mean? It is most unusual to grant a pardon to a convict sent out for life; it is most unusual for a man sentenced to death to have that sentence commuted for less than a life servitude. It is not unusual for a convict to escape. Why does not the man come openly?'

'You mean——'

'I mean that since he knows his rights, or some of them, he might as well come in broad daylight and claim them.'

'He says he will.'

'He breaks into the house at night; in the morning he sends a woman for more money. Who is the woman? and why does he not come himself?'

‘Suppose he comes again to-night?’

‘Dear madam, you must be content for a while to be under guard and protection. Meantime, I assure you, madam, there are many points in your favour. He is an ex-convict, perhaps still a convict; he would have to prove his marriage.’

‘Could it be denied?’

‘Everything has to be proved; there is no question of denial. It was a Fleet marriage. The registers are kept loosely; perhaps there is no record. I am sure that he himself has no record. There is no other witness except Mrs. Brymer, who will certainly hold her tongue. Then there is that woman—the woman who came as his messenger. Who is she? Who is that woman, again? How is it that so soon after his return he finds a woman obedient to him? Why does he talk of lying snug? And why does he go to Wapping instead of his old haunts, which I take to have been Turnmill Street or Clerkenwell Green?’

‘You give me new courage, my friend.’

‘As for the man Fulton, you may laugh at him; you have nothing at all to fear from him. He cannot speak for the drink that is always in him. Your brother-in-law dares not offend you, and as regards Pinder, I suppose you will have to pay his bill, which will be exorbitant.’

‘Yes, yes; I will pay.’

‘But not yet. Let me act for you. You must not pay more than is necessary. The first thing is to go, myself, to the White Dog, and see Truxo without being seen.’

‘Oh, take care! he is dangerous.’

‘I am not going in a lawyer’s gown. I have not lived

in Dublin for nothing. Madam'—again he kissed her hand—'if I can bring this villain's plans to destruction I shall be more than happy.'

'Mr. Macnamara! Oliver! Oh, I am truly thankful that I resolved to tell you all. And—and, Oliver, be my friend still; do not despise me too much.'

CHAPTER XVII

GREAT HERMITAGE STREET

THE White Dog of Great Hermitage Street, Wapping, is a tavern entirely devoted to the refreshment, amusement, recreation, and entertainment of sailors, bargemen, lightermen, watermen, boat-builders, and makers of masts, oars, blocks, ropes, sails, tarpaulins, marline-spikes, and every other kind of gear for ships and boats. In addition to these gentry the house admits to its company and its entertainments the wives, daughters, sisters, and sweethearts of the men. It is, therefore, at all times a cheerful, mirthful, roistering, boisterous society which finds itself every evening in the large room of the tavern. There is always fiddling in that room; from noon to midnight the fiddle is scraped; sometimes there is a harp as well. There is always singing; from noon to midnight the brave fellows with their beauteous partners are making the ambient air melodious; there are interludes of dancing, whether of the jig or the hornpipe; there are also most delightful interludes of fighting, and there is always without cessation offered up the incense of tobacco, with the libations of rum, gin, black beer, and October. Externally, the house hath a rusty appearance for want of fresh paint and the scrubbing-brush. But why should money be spent in these things when they are not wanted? The visitor



A CHEERFUL, BOISTEROUS SOCIETY.

descends two steps on entering the low door ; he finds himself in a long low room with a sanded floor. It is provided with benches and settees ; the window is garnished with a red curtain ; the bar where drinks are drawn is guarded or defended by a couple of stalwart tapsters, whose business it is not only to draw the beer and mix the punch, but also on occasions—*i.e.*, every day—to fight the quarrelsome, and to turn out those who will not pay.

The position of the house is most happy. It is withdrawn a little from the riverside, yet conveniently placed for those who get their living by the river or on the bank, and the landlord enjoys the reputation—no doubt justly earned—of extraordinary generosity in the purchase of foreign produce, such as rum, sugar, tobacco, and spices, stolen from the ships by the lightermen and the watermen.

Every evening, then, this room is filled with the people above named, especially with sailors. Here may be found sailors from every port in the country—from London, Bristol, Portsmouth, Southampton, Dover, Plymouth, Lynn, Falmouth, Hull, Newcastle, Whitehaven—everywhere. There are old sailors and young sailors ; the latter bring their sweethearts : some, but not many, of the former bring their wives—truth to tell, the place is frequented more by sweethearts of the temporary kind than by wives and permanent consorts ; there are also the riverside folk above mentioned ; there are craftsmen of various kinds ; and it is as godless, drunken, noisy, and debauched a place as one may find all over London, not even excepting Tower Hill, Turnmill Street, Clerkenwell, and the fragrant banks of the Fleet.

Every evening, all the year round, there is a large coal

fire burning in a vast fireplace—one cannot make the room too warm ; besides, the fire sweetens the air of the room, which would otherwise be too much even for these strong stomachs ; on the hob, summer and winter, stands a huge kettle filled with water, that is always bubbling and boiling ; beside the fire are hanging up, unless they are in use, a frying-pan, a gridiron, and a pot for the convenience of that part of the company which may bring, and wish to cook, their own supper, whether it consists of a lump of pork or a beefsteak, of a pound of sausages or a bloater, of a mutton chop or pig's fry broiled with onions ; forks they have none, nor plates, but every man carries his knife with him—a knife which serves many purposes ; and for plates they employ the primitive platter of a thick slice of bread ; for choice that with the crust underneath, which keeps in the gravy. What can be more handy or more delicious than to eat your own plate after you have eaten the meat that was on it ?

This evening there were gathered round the fire half a dozen sailors with red faces, scorching their hands over the frizzling, hissing, fragrant delicacies they had in the frying pan or on the grill, and making ready for supper.

In the corner—in such places he is always found in the corner—sat a fiddler, head tilted back, elbow raised, performing his lustiest and best, while a young fellow in sailors' petticoats was bawling to this accompaniment a pitiful ballad of many verses. The company paid but little heed to this burst of melody ; they were accustomed to singing of this kind every night. Indeed, the song was not of a character to inspire one with joy, or even cheerfulness, yet the singer enjoyed it, and went solemnly through the whole long ditty, his head thrown back and his eyes fixed on the

beams in a kind of rapture. Every man and every woman in the room had a tankard of beer or a pannikin of rum, or a thick round glass, which one might drop or throw at another drinker's head without fear of breaking it. The glass contained punch of a kind suited to their delicate palates—namely, punch very hot, very strong, and very sweet. Most of the men were taking tobacco. As for the room itself, the fresh sand concealed the old dirt and grime; the curtained windows were closed, and had not been opened within the memory of man; the ceiling was low: the room was lit by three or four tallow candles stuck in tin sconces against the wall; the light was dim, partly because the room was filled with tobacco smoke, partly because the candles always wanted snuffing, and the tapsters neglected this part of their duty; the candles were therefore dimly seen in a kind of haze or cloud, and the reek of the room was enough on the first entrance to turn the stomach of an ox.

Among the company sat a giant of a man, nearer seven feet than six in height; a broad and burly man, strong in proportion to his length of limb—in this respect unlike most tall men, who are generally weak in their legs if not in their arms. This man was as lusty as any fellow of five feet ten. He was in the vigour of manhood, being not more than twenty-eight or so, and might have sat as a model for a sculptor, so fine was his figure and so goodly was his person. He was, in fact, perfectly proportioned in all his limbs. His colour, however, was against him, for he was a black—a negro—thorough and perfect. There are, as I have reminded you before, two kinds of blacks—very likely there are more than two kinds, but only two are generally known—the shiny black, whose face reflects the sunshine, and seems to return rays of its

own ; and the velvety black, which absorbs the sunshine, and all other kinds of light, and reflects nothing. This negro was of the latter kind : when the light fell upon his face, it disappeared ; it produced a night—total eclipse ; darkness absorbed it all ; he sat in a blackness of his own creation.

He was dressed in a strange collection of rags. He had a waistcoat with sleeves which had been of a brown and coarse cloth ; it was now full of holes ; the buttons were gone, and the garment was pinned and kept together all the way up by two skewers ; his small-clothes were like his waistcoat, and equally ragged, and also kept in place by a wooden skewer ; he wore no stockings, but his bare black legs struck the beholder with less surprise than if they had been white—it seems natural for a negro to be barelegged ; there was no appearance of linen about his neck or his wrists ; his shoes were of the cheapest and roughest kind ; he had no hat, nor, indeed, did he ever feel the want of one, with the thick fleece of wool which covered his head, protected him from the sun, and was impervious to rain. His eyes shone like balls of fire in the candlelight, and his teeth showed of a creamy white whenever he spoke. With him, sitting on his knee, was a woman. She was none other than the person whom we have already seen in St. James's Square as a messenger. Her face was bruised and knocked about—cheeks and eyes and lips—apparently with recent ill-usage, but that fact certainly made no difference to her openly-proclaimed fondness for this big black man. There are many women in her station of life—poor fond things!—for whom a beating, a cudgelling, a kicking, the application of ropes and of straps, a knocking down, a black eye, a whole face black with brutal treatment, does not destroy the blind

love with which they regard their men. In the case of Doll—the lady's name was Doll—she was so happy to have her man back again—he had only recently, within the last few days, returned from the plantations of Virginia—that she accepted the cuffing with which the negro had already treated her as a sign and proof of the strong, special, and singular affection with which he regarded her, and for the sake of which he had singled her out from among her companions of St. Katherine's by the Tower and Wapping on the Wall. So she sat upon his knee and took care to replenish and keep going his tin pannikin, which contained rum and water in equal proportions, the water being hot and the mixture improved by a slice of lemon and a spoonful of sugar as black as molasses. And she laughed and smiled and was as completely happy as a woman can desire. For his part, the negro gave her drink out of his pannikin, being a compassionate and soft-hearted creature, who, when he had beaten and lashed her in order to teach her obedience and the useful lesson that the will and pleasure of a man is the only proper study of a woman, was not unwilling that she, too, should have some share in what was forward, whether it was the choice dish of fried pork with onions, which formed both the dinner and the supper of this epicure, or the beer which accompanied the dish, or the rum-and-water which followed the dish in the afternoon, lasting till the evening shades prevailed, and began again in the evening, lasting until the night was far spent and it was time for bed.

The negro was offering drinks around with a free hand ; the lightermen, for their part, scorned to accept his invitation, being perfectly able to pay for themselves ; those of the sailors who were spending their pay also refused the invitation ; those of the sailors who were

approaching the end of their money accepted his generosity, and the craftsmen, who did not stand upon their dignity, but rejoiced in free drinks, also accepted with alacrity whatever cost them nothing.

Towards eight o'clock or so there looked into the room, with the appearance of great caution and at first through the half-open door, as if suspecting the presence of some hostile or dangerous element, a young fellow, who appeared to be a common labouring man. He was dressed in a rough frieze coat, with woollen stockings, and shoes tied with string. He carried in his hand a handkerchief, in which were doubtless his whole earthly possessions. His lank hair hung down over his shoulders; his chin was bristly; his hat was battered and broken; under his arm was a stout club; his face was smudged, perhaps with the unwashed grime of a recent job; his hands were stained and as unwashed as his face. He looked in, holding the door as if in readiness for sudden flight, and peered about the room curiously.

'All friends here?' he asked presently.

The negro replied for the company.

'All friends here. Come in, brother, and have a drink. Call for what you like—whatever you like. You're in luck to-night; I pay for all.'

The man obeyed, taking a seat beside the negro—the seat avoided by the company, because the man had already acquired a reputation for quick temper, unexpected cuffs, and sudden assaults.

'I'll have rum and hot water,' said the newcomer, putting his handkerchief under the seat. 'Plenty of rum and not too much water.'

'What's your trade? and what are you doing here?' asked the negro.

The rest of the company took no notice of his arrival at all. A stranger more or less made no difference.

‘You’re not a sailor to look at.’

‘No, I’m not a sailor; I’m a carpenter by trade. I’m an Irishman from Dobblun.’ He spoke in a strong Irish accent.

‘If you’re from Dublin, what are you doing here in London?’

‘Looking for a job. You see—all friends here?’ His voice dropped. He addressed the negro confidentially. ‘You see, mate, there was a bit of a trouble over there. Not much, you know, but they told lies.’

‘What kind of trouble?’ The negro lowered his voice. ‘We’re all friends here, but I wouldn’t talk so loud, mate, if I was you.’

‘A gentleman’s house in Dobblun was broken into one night,’ the man replied in a whisper. His Irish accent, stronger than ever, need not be reproduced. ‘There was a trifle of plate stolen; they found it in the back-yard, where I happened to have business, and they said I done it. I scorned to answer their base lies, and I came away—that’s the trouble.’

‘You’re lucky to get away. Many’s the young fellow they entrap with their false witness and clap into prison, and take out for the stretching for less than that.’

‘True for you.’ He buried his face in the rum-and-water. ‘Did you ever have trouble of your own, now?’

‘That’s as may be. Perhaps I have, perhaps I haven’t. Why should I tell you, eh? You’re a stranger to me. How do I know who you are?’

‘True for ye—true for ye,’ said the Irishman. ‘Best hold your tongue in these times.’

There was a young sailor kicking the floor to a hornpipe, the fiddler playing for him lustily. Just then he finished up with a resounding double tap of his heel on the boards, and looked round for the applause which always attends a hornpipe executed with taste and time. It is an exhibition of skill which never fails to command attention and praise.

But the carpenter from Dobblun sprang to his feet.

‘That’s very good,’ he cried. ‘Very good it is. But wait—wait, now, till I show you how we do it in ould Oir-land.’

The fiddler struck up another tune, one of those lively measures which answer equally well for an Irish jig or an English hornpipe, or for any popular dance, and the Irishman, brandishing his short stick, sprang into the centre of the room with a wild shriek, and began a dance which, for vivacity and vigour, certainly knocked the previous performance out of sight. He flourished his club over his head; he threw it up and caught it with a wild ‘Hurrah!’ his legs seemed gifted with motions of their own, quite unconnected with the joints attaching them to the trunk; his arms kept time with his legs; he shouted as he danced. At last he stopped, his face streaming.

‘There!’ he said; ‘that’s what we call a dance in Dobblun.’

‘So it is,’ said the black, while all the room resounded with applause. ‘So it is; I’ve seen the Irish dance on the deck at sea and in Virg—that is, elsewhere. Have another drink, man. That’s the kind of dance we like in my country. You should see the people on the Gold Coast dancing of a moonlight night.’

The Irishman took another drink, and sat down again beside the negro in the most friendly way possible. It

was wonderful, if you think of it, to see the way in which he took to the black man from the very first.

‘I had a brother wanst,’ he said. ‘Begorra! he was the boy for dancing. He’d dance down Methusalem himself—the good old man! My brother, the poor man! fell into trouble, too. Faith! it’s in the family. And he was sent to Virginia to the plantations, he was, the poor crather! But I never heard tell of um since the day he went out.’

‘What did he go for?’

‘They sentenced him to death, but they let him off with transportation to Virginia. We thought he’d soon be home again. Nothing more easy, they tell me, for a transported man than to get aboard a ship and to work your way home. But you must keep out of harm’s way when you are at home. In my country once he gets there he’s safe; not a man, nor a woman, nor a child, will inform against him; he only has to keep out of the big towns and the main streets. We looked for him to come home, but he never come, so that we’re sure now that he’s dead. Took a fever, likely, and so died. Here’s his memory and a quick passage through Purgatory for his soul!’

‘What’s his name?’

‘Shamus O’Hara. He’s my own brother. Did you ever see um?’

‘How could I? Was I ever in Virginia?’

‘I don’t know. There’s a many goes to Virginia and some comes back—why not you among ’em all? However, you was never there, so it’s no use asking.’

‘Well, I never saw your brother, nor I never heard of him; nor I never was in Virginia.’

‘And that’s wonderful, too. But it shows you were never there. Because Shamus couldn’t be in a place more than an hour or so without telling all the world that he

was there. If he couldn't dance he would fight. So you never heard of me brother? He must be dead, then. Was you in Virginia long?

'Two or three years.' The negro forgot that he had never been to Virginia.

'Tis a fine country, they tell me. Perhaps I'll see it. If they catch me they will send me there, unless——' He made the familiar jerk with his left thumb towards his neck which expresses the other possibility.

'Tis a fine country for them as has their liberty,' said the black. 'For them as has to work in the fields 'tis a devil of a country!'

'So long as you're back again, what odds? I'm thinking—ho! ho!—you'd be a queer customer in a fight. Did ye fight your way out, now?'

The negro swelled with pride and importance. The feat which gave him his freedom ought to be known; he felt that concealment was unworthy of so great a deed. Besides, the young man, with his own little difficulty, was a brother in danger—one who would appreciate an act of daring. And, in addition, the negro was a vainglorious creature, easily accessible on the side of his vanity.

'There were three overseers,' he said. 'They were armed with their whips and with nothing else. There was only one other who would join me. We had clubs, and nothing more. When the fight was over the three overseers was laid low.'

'They were kilt entirely?'

'Dead as mutton, they were; their skulls cracked like eggshells——'

The Irishman grasped his hand.

'Brother,' he said, 'you're the right sort—you're the right sort. You're the kind of man I like. You ought

to be in Oirland. Come back with me. We'll go to Cork, not to Dobblun; they won't look for me in Cork, and they won't look for you neither in Cork nor in Dobblun. Cork's the town for you! Why, in this place—this is a great company entirely, and we're all drinking quiet and reasonable. But how do you know there isn't a man in the room looking about and asking who we are—eh? That would be awkward, wouldn't it?' They were now talking together in a confidential whisper.

The negro made a few general remarks about cracking skulls of spies and informers.

'Right!' said the other with emphasis—'right! I pity them if you once got them in your clutches.'

'Have some more drink?'

'I will, and thanks to you. The drink at this house is good.'

See how, without further trouble than a little blarney, the negro, easily fooled, had given up his secret; he had avowed, to a stranger, that he was a convict who had broken his sentence and escaped; who had murdered the overseers as a means of escape; working his way home, probably, as a sailor from New York. He was therefore liable to be hanged, and would be hanged to a certainty, if he were caught.

Oliver, as your penetration has already doubtless discovered, was the young Irishman in disguise. He had another suspicion, which he was anxious to prove. So he went on fooling the great giant.

'Begorra!' he said, 'tis a fine man and a proper man ye are! 'Twould be a thousand pities if they were to get a hould of ye and clap ye into Newgate. Keep quiet, man; keep out of their way, like me. But a man can't get along without money. I've got to find a job somewhere.

It isn't likely that there will be constables from Dobbblun looking for me along the riverside; but there may be—there may be; I don't know—I've got to run the risk.'

'It is a risk,' said the negro. 'I own that it is a risk.'

'It's always a risk for everybody; for a fine, big, handsome man like you the risk is much greater than for a common-looking chap like me. Why, who would forget you, wanst he set eyes on you? What are you going to do about money, mate? Going to pick it up among the ships?'

The man laughed.

'I've no trouble about money. All I've got to do is to ask for as much as I want.'

'Well, some folks are lucky! Is it ask and you'll find?'

'That is the way. I ask and I find as much money as I want, as much money as I can spend—money to treat all this company—money to keep me quiet in this tavern.'

'Ye're a lucky man, Misther—your name I did not catch.'

'What's the use of a name, unless you want it proclaimed about the town? Some of us are not anxious for everybody to know what we are.'

'I don't want to know your name.' The Irishman's voice grew thick. He was apparently touched with the drink. 'What's your name to me? You're a fine fellow and a proper fellow. I shall come here again.'

'Come as often as you like. I shall be here. Where will you be?'

'That depends—I want a job. Can you give me a job? Come'—he dropped his voice again to a thick and hoarse whisper: he had certainly taken as much as was good for him—'we don't want to be seen and known, do we? But

they don't know me. Nobody in London knows me. If you want a handy man to fetch and carry, I'm at your service. I'm not afraid of being seen.'

'You seem a likely lad enough. Let me think it over.'

'There's your good woman, here—your wife. She is your wife, I suppose?'

Doll sprang to her feet, touched to the quick by the base suggestion that she could be anything but the negro's wife. She lifted her hand and arm—they were second to no feminine hand and arm outside Billingsgate; they were inferior in strength to the hands and arms of few men; they had practised, so to speak, in the streets of Wapping, and on its numerous stairs. She administered a cuff on the left of the Irishman's head that fairly knocked him off the bench and laid him prone upon the sanded floor. By great good luck she did not knock off his wig, otherwise it would have gone hard with him. He grasped the disguise of his false hair, and, finding that it was still in place, he rose, shaking himself amid the jeers—but the friendly jeers—of the company, by whom the incident was considered a piece of the finest comedy.

'I'll teach you,' Doll cried, flaming, 'to ask if I'm his wife or not!'

'Av coorse,' the Irishman replied, 'I now perceive that you are.'

'We've been married,' she continued, 'these five years; haven't we?' she appealed to her husband.

'Av coorse,' the Irishman repeated. 'Faith! my head is ringing wid your five years. Lucky for me it wasn't ten.'

'His truly married wife, I am.'

'You are, you are,' he hastened to add. 'Show me the boy who would deny that same. I'm wondering if my

head is on my shoulders still. Faith! you've a very pretty way of reminding a man of his politeness. I beg your pardon, but I never doubted that you were the gentleman's wife. Well, you've a mighty heavy hand. But you'll be glad to get him back again—and him such a fine man and such a proper man.'

'Doll,' said her husband, 'is jealous. Lord love her! they're all jealous. She need not be jealous of me. There were no women in the plantation where I was at work. That's what I tell her. Now, about sending on errands. I did send Doll this morning with a message, and they made a fool of her.'

'To what part of the town? I know St. Katherine's by the Tower, and that's all.'

'She went to St. James's Square. It is at the other end of the town. They turned her out of doors, and she came away. Why, she ought to have sat on the doorstep all night until she got an answer.'

'I dare say'—as if mindful of that masculine cuff, the Irishman hastened to conciliate the lady—'that Mistress Doll did what was quite right.'

'No, she didn't. She did what was quite wrong. Well, I won't say, but I may employ you. There's a many things that I want. There's victuals to buy—you can cook at the fireplace here—and there's clothes to get—I'm tired of these rags—and there's messages to St. James's Square. I'm going there this evening to straighten out things. In the daytime I'd best not show. I might send you if you'd carry messages safe without taking the money.'

'Is it to take the money? Why, there——' The Irishman rose. 'I'm going to take a look around,' he said. 'Where's my trusty shillelagh? Well, misther, I'll be

looking in to-morrow morning. You'll find me a trusty messenger. I'll fetch and carry for you until I get a job; it must be in a carpenter's shop, not a boat-builder's. And, misther'—again he lowered his voice—'honour among gentlemen. I've put my neck into your hands.'

'Honour it is,' replied the negro.

And he entirely forgot—perhaps the rum-and-water caused him to forget—that he had also placed his own neck in the hands of this stranger.

CHAPTER XVIII

ONLY A HOUSEBREAKER

It was after eleven that same evening when Oliver, his late disguise laid aside, arrived at St. James's Square. Alice heard his footstep and met him. 'Alas!' she said, 'there is trouble in the house; I am so glad you have come, though it is so late. Madam has been walking about the room all the evening: sometimes she bursts into tears, sometimes she holds her head in her hands and sighs. She will not listen to me. I cannot tell what to say or to do! Oh, Oliver, have you come to help her?'

'Cheer up, Alice. I have been engaged on her business all the evening. Yes, I have come to do what I can. There is trouble and there is danger, but I bring her news of comfort and hope. Go to bed, Alice, and sleep.'

He entered the drawing-room: Isabel was crouched in her chair beside the window; the room was again lit by two candles only, which made an island of light and caused the rest of the room to lie in deeper darkness. But Isabel would have no more light. It was maddening to think of the object of her terror in total darkness; it was horrible to look at him even in the twilight of her two candles: in the splendour of a dozen candles he would be intolerable.

'Oliver!' she cried, starting to her feet. 'Oh, I thought it was—that creature come again! I sit and wait

in expectation for his footsteps. I keep thinking that I see his horrible face in the shadows.'

'No, madam. He may come again this evening. Indeed, I am certain that he will come again this evening. But he has not come yet, and when he does come he will not have you, but me, to deal with. He does not expect that.'

Isabel moaned and threw herself back in her chair. She only understood that the negro was coming.

'Oh! He will come: he will come!'

The sense of protection and help which had brought her comfort after confession had passed away; she was again sick with terror. What could Oliver—what could any man—do for her? How should she escape this creature? He had his rights, even over the whole of her fortune; and he knew the fact: and she had refused him those rights in refusing him money. He would come again: would come in the dead of night; no locks or bars would keep him out; if he did not find her in one room he would unlock all the rooms one after the other until he discovered her. Think of the terror of being unable to escape! Think of the terror of being startled out of sleep to find this monster standing beside the bed! No safety, no way of escape, except by flight. And whither to go so that he should not find her out? Can there be any misery in the world worse than the misery of being hunted by an implacable and a relentless enemy—more implacable and more relentless in imagination than in reality? No safety for her anywhere; and she clutched the dagger that lay hidden in her bosom as her last friend in case of direst need.

She had sent Alice away; she could not bear her sympathy and her attempts to help and console. She hoped to see Oliver, but she had no longer any confidence in him

or in anyone; she was left alone in the house to face the black monster.

And then he opened the door in a fine, free, courageous way, flinging it wide open and marching across the room with a manly confidence that suddenly restored her hopes.

‘Madam,’ he touched her fingers; the contact of his strong hand revived her; the note of his full strong voice acted upon her like some magic or mysterious medicine; she sat up eager to hear if anything had been done. ‘I am late,’ he said. ‘It is nearly midnight, but it was impossible for me to come earlier. I fear you have waited for me. You did not, I am sure, begin to think I had deserted you.’

‘I did not doubt your goodwill, my friend, but your power.’

‘I have discovered everything that I suspected. There is a great deal to tell you. For to-night I will only tell you the essentials. Dear me! it is a foolish and a clumsy rogue. It wanted so very little, after all, to learn the truth. Briefly, dear madam, you have been terrified by a mere bogey—a children’s bogey; a hobgoblin; a harmless pretender! The man cannot hurt you, but you can hurt him. Oh, yes! you can hurt him in the one way which can never be remedied. That, however, he does not yet understand.’

‘Oh! What have you done? What do you mean? What have you found out? He a children’s bogey? But I married him! Oliver, you forget—I am his wife! Oh! his shameful wife!’

‘Briefly, again, I have learned enough to set you free. Presently I will tell you how.’

‘Enough to set me free? Enough to set me free? Oliver’—she clutched his hand—‘if you knew how I have

suffered ! Oh ! If you only knew ! Tell me—tell me at once what you mean.’

‘What I have found is, I repeat, a way of release—nothing less. An easy way, and yet—but you shall hear.’

‘My release ? But the man will come here again to-night. I am certain that he will come.’

‘Yes,’ said Oliver soberly ; ‘I believe that he is now on the way here.’

‘Oh !’ She clutched his arm. ‘Do not leave me. Yet he will murder you. Let him murder me, not you. Oh ! his eyes look murderous, Oliver ! I tremble—I shake—with terror. If I could only make you understand the awful loathing with which the sight of this horrible creature fills my very soul. The loathing, the remorse, the terror.’

‘Dear madam, I have spent the whole evening in the company of this creature and his companions. I am sick with the talk of this man, with his nauseous hospitality, with the reek and the stink of the place. I can understand your loathing, believe me. I sat beside him ; I have spoken friendly words to him ; I have taken his drink. Loathing ? Disgust ? What else can you feel ?’

‘You have spent the evening—this evening—in his company ? Where ? He did not try to kill you ?’

‘At the tavern of which he told you—at the White Dog in Great Hermitage Street, Wapping. He is not always killing people ; and, besides, people object to being killed and sometimes carry weapons. Give me your attention, madam, for a few minutes, if you can bear to speak about this man for so long.’

‘Oh, Oliver, for as long as you please, if my release is at hand. Speak of him ! I can think only of him and of my hopes of escape.’

‘You shall hear of him, then, and receive hopes. I went there disguised; it was not safe to go in an open way; a lawyer at Wapping is liable to be knocked o’ the head. I was disguised as an Irish working-man, a man from Dublin, in trouble on account of a robbery of some kind. I can dress up, and disguise myself, and talk and act after the fashion of the Irish common folk. Was I not brought up among them? I went first to a friend of mine, an ingenious countryman who plays at Drury Lane. He lent me a wig of hair, uncombed and hanging down in rats’ tails to the shoulders, such as those people wear, and he dressed me after their fashion in frieze, with a thumping club and a handkerchief full of trumpery. I smudged my face and smeared my hands, as these workmen do, and in this disguise I had nothing to fear. So I made my way to the tavern, and presently found our gentleman—fortunately he is easy to recognise—in the midst of a company like himself—a ragamuffin crew, but not black like him, consisting of sailors and lightermen and craftsmen of the place, all drinking, with a fiddle to make music for them while they sang their songs, which have no ending. I sat down beside this great black beast. He appears to be a very fine specimen of a race which does not always, I believe, assume such magnificent proportions. Most negroes, I have always thought, were a flatfooted, shambling lot, with round shins and heels like pegs. Our friend, on the contrary, is a kind of black Apollo, about twice as big as the Greek Apollo and ten times as strong. The creature was generously offering drink to the whole company—with your money, of course—a cheap generosity, which he proposes to repeat. He had taken, I presently found, quite enough already to loosen his tongue. Now, there was something of the sailor about his talk and

his ways—a certain freedom of speech, based upon ignorance of the world, common to those who have been to sea—so that my suspicions were strengthened. I will tell you directly what those suspicions were. Remember that, as he told you, he has not long since returned to this country; he has not been long ashore; that he confessed to you. His hands had marks of tar; there was a maritime and tarry flavour about his clothes. What did that mean? That he had worked his way home. He is not a sailor by calling, that is certain: he had worked his way home. Think what that means: he had worked his way home. From what country? From Virginia. I got at that fact by a little careful cross-examination. Who are the men who do that? They are the runaways from the plantations. That discovery came later. At first it was no more than a suspicion and—let me confess it—a hope, because runaways are hanged as soon as they are caught. So I sat beside him, I say, and talked. First I talked of my own affairs. I was a runaway from Dublin; I was in trouble; there had been a robbery with violence, a housebreaking or something, of which I was accused—the common story with such gentry. The thief-takers, I said, were after me. If I was caught I should be tried and hanged. But the thing happened in Dublin; perhaps in London I should be safe. The soft braggart fool listened and became interested. Confidence begets confidence. Presently he began to talk about himself.

‘Oh! And what did he tell you?’

‘Things very important, indeed, to us. Not all at once, but by bits, he let out the whole. He was shy at first; what seemed to establish confidence completely was an Irish jig. I danced a jig in the Hibernian manner, with plenty of shouting and the brandishing of the

shillelagh. My black friend's suspicions, if he had any—I do not think that he had—were lulled by that dance. You see that no one in the profession of rogue, house-breaker, footpad, or highwayman, had ever before heard of a Bow Street runner or constable, or turnkey or thief-taker, who talked broad Irish and danced an Irish jig. Therefore, I say, he returned confidence for confidence.'

'His confidence. Oh, his confidence! What was it? Tell me quickly.'

'His confidence means your freedom, madam. It is nothing less, believe me; for he gave me to understand—he simply confessed—that, having been sent to the plantations (he did not say for what offence), he has escaped, and has now returned to England; therefore his life is forfeit. He knows that very well. I could see it in an apprehensive glance when the door was opened. Do you quite understand what it means? Well, it means this: I can go to Bow Street to-morrow, and I can cause his arrest without appearing as a witness at all. I have only to inform the magistrate that the man Adolphus Truxo, sent to the plantations for life, has escaped, and is now at Wapping. That is all. He will then be arrested, carried to Newgate, and executed with the greatest despatch and certainty. There will be no more mercy for him. Added to his escape, according to his own account—but he may be lying; 'tis a boastful villain—he has murdered two or three overseers of the plantation where he worked. The news has not yet, perhaps, reached this country, but, if it is true, it will be reported over here either before or after his execution. As regards the latter, a murder or two will make no difference. The man will be hanged to a certainty, first, for breaking his sentence of transportation, and, if not for that, then on account of the old sentence,

for which he has already lain in the condemned cells, not to speak of the murder of the overseers.'

'Oh!' Isabel clapped her hands and sat upright. 'Oliver, you are wonderful—you are wonderful! I have always said that you would bring luck to the house.'

'You deserve, madam, that I should bring luck to your house. I ought to bring the best kind of luck in return for goodness without parallel.'

She sighed, thinking of certain words she had overheard between this young man and her companion.

'I must finish my story,' he said, 'for, indeed, it is not so simple as it seems at first. There is another and a most unexpected thing. The man had a woman with him—the woman who, I understand, came here with a message from him this very morning. You saw her——'

'I saw a wretched creature, all rags and dirt, who sent me a note on a dirty piece of paper, ill-spelt, demanding money. She was his messenger. Is she also his mistress?'

'She is all rags and dirt. In that respect she matches the man. Unless she was all rags and dirt she could not be his companion, nor could she sit in that tavern. Now, madam, unless that woman lied, which I do not believe, she is nothing less than the wife of the adventurous negro; she has been married to him these five years. She declared, with an oath and a cuff which knocked me over—my head is ringing with it yet—that she is his wife. She is certainly jealous. If she tells the truth (which I believe), observe, pray, that you were not married to the man at all. The ceremony meant nothing, except bigamy on his part. I acknowledge that I have as yet no proof of her statement. The woman may have lied, but I doubt it. If she tells the truth, do you not see another way to freedom?'

‘It is dreadful,’ she replied, ‘to desire the death of any man, especially of so great a sinner. But yet—yet—I would rather make certain about the marriage. Oh, I must regain my freedom—that, at any cost. Yet, my friend, I would not give up this wretch, if I could avoid it, to certain death. To kill the man! to be a murderer! even to bring this man to justice, it would be on my conscience for the rest of my life!’

‘You shall not have anything to do with the ordering of justice, dear madam. You shall not even know what has been ordered and what has been done. Truxo shall vanish and be no more seen. If necessary, I will myself undertake the job. A workmanlike job I will make of it, too. But we must consider your position first and before all. It may not be altogether desirable in your interests to hang him off-hand. The fellow would perhaps become a popular criminal. Now, the mob love a big and a strong man. There might be hawked about under the gallows and on the Tyburn road a “Last Dying Speech and Confession,” with a doggerel ballad about the “Cruel Lady of St. James’s Square and the Gallant Black.” One does not know. The ballad would do no harm, perhaps; on the other hand, it might be better to avoid this possible scandal.’

‘What would you propose, then? Oliver, you think of everything, and I, poor wretch! can only shake with terror.’

‘I have thought of a plan, but it is not easy. I am not quite certain whether it can be carried through.’

‘Would your plan save his life? Would it leave him free to come here again?’

The crowning terror in the lady’s mind was that he might come again.

‘Breathe freely, madam. Whatever happens he shall not trouble you. It is, however, as well to remember that there is another way possible besides the rough-and-ready method of laying an information at Bow Street. Believe me, dear madam, the thing is as good as done.’

‘Oh, Oliver, I will joyfully leave the whole business in your hands. If you can only bring it to a close without a scandal!’

‘I will do my best. Meantime, it is now nearly midnight. Let your servants go to bed. Do you go to your own room. I will sit up here and receive him if he comes.’

‘Do you think he will come? Do you think he suspects? Do you think he will know you again?’

‘He is sure to come; he told me that he meant to come. I have with me a sword, as you see’ (it is not common for a lawyer to have a sword, but he was thus begirt), ‘and a brace of pistols. I may have to use them; in which case it will only be one housebreaker the less. But I think he will listen to reason, and recognise the pistols. As for the rest, he suspects nothing, and he is quite certain not to recognise me.’

Isabel obeyed. She went to her own room at the back of the drawing-room, and then, with door locked and bolted, she listened. For a long time she waited and listened. Presently she heard voices; they were not loud voices; chiefly she heard one voice, and it was Oliver’s; then there was silence. When she was quite sure that there was but one person left, she unlocked the door and came out.

Left alone, Oliver prepared for possibilities. These were manifold. The man might become fierce; he might recognise the Irish refugee; he might refuse to obey, in

which case it would be necessary to shoot him. Accordingly, Oliver placed the two candles behind a screen; they afforded a dim light on the ceiling of a single corner in the great room; he placed himself at Isabel's small table, his pistols cocked in readiness; he loosened his sword in the scabbard, and he prepared to wait.

He sat expectant, watchful; the clock of St. James's Church hard-by struck twelve, and then the quarters, and then one. The Square had been faintly lit at night-fall by half a dozen glimmering oil-lamps; these were supposed to last all night, but they went out, one after the other; the watchman walked his rounds, bellowing the time; there was no other sound of life, no footstep, no voice, in the Square. He was prepared to wait all night, for he knew that the man would come. But it is a long way from Wapping to St. James's Square, and Mr. Truxo would not, most certainly, take either a hackney coach or a chair. He would walk, and, as he was already well advanced in drink when Oliver left him, he would not walk fast.

About half-past one in the morning, he observed suddenly that the negro was in the room. He had opened the door and entered the room without making the least noise, a thing in itself terrifying. In the twilight of the room his eyes were like two balls of fire, and his white teeth gleamed.

The screen concealed the candles, but allowed the light to lie like a triangle on the ceiling. Oliver, at the table, was invisible. He rose when he saw the dim outline of the man's figure, and lifted one of the pistols.

The negro stood irresolute; he did not at first make out the figure of Oliver; he looked about him; the woman whom he came to see appeared not to be in the room, but

there was the light of the candles above the screen. He took a step forward. Then Oliver drew back the screen, letting the light fall upon the man's face and revealing himself.

'Who are you?' he asked. 'What do you want?'

'I want Mrs. Weyland. Who are you?' I want Mrs. Weyland, as she calls herself. Cluck, cluck!'

'You cannot see that lady.'

'I will see her. Do you know who I am, and who she is? Go and bring her, or I will murder you.'

'Don't bluster here, impudent nigger, or you will get the worst of it. I shall not bring her, and you will not murder me.'

'Bring the woman, I say'—but he still spoke in a whisper—'or it will be the worse for her and for you. I know how to bring women to heel.'

'You will not see her, either to-night or any other night. Go!'

'Go?' the man laughed. 'Why, I came to see her. If you do not bring her I shall wait here all night.'

'If you do not go I will ring the bell and call up the servants.'

'Call them up, if you dare, and I will tell them who I am. The servants? They are my servants. The house is my house. What are you doing in my house? Go out of my house before I break your skull.'

Oliver raised his pistol.

'Take one single step and I will shoot you. Then I will ring the bell and call up the servants, and tell them to drag out the body of the housebreaker.'

The man stopped and hesitated. The barrel of the pistol glimmered in the light of the candles. It was a steady and a determined glimmer; there was no trembling

in the hand of the speaker, and his voice showed no sign of terror or hesitation.

‘So,’ said Oliver, still covering him with the pistol, and watching him as one watches an antagonist in a duel, ‘you will think better, I believe, about calling up the servants. Because, Mr. Adolphus Truxo, you are wanted elsewhere.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘I mean that if you move I shall fire. If I ring this bell, you will be arrested or killed; if you are arrested it will not be as a housebreaker only, but as an escaped convict; you will not be tried for breaking your conditions, but you will be hanged at once without hope of reprieve. Do you now begin to understand?’

The man made no reply.

‘Stay here all night if you please. I shall stay here all night as well. I have my pistols, and will use them if you threaten. In the morning the people of the household will come. Even if you escape them we know where to find you. If you were to murder me, you would not escape. There is no escape possible for you. Do you understand all this?’

‘Who are you?’ The negro did not understand what was meant. He did not understand this unexpected intervention on the part of this surprising person. ‘How do you know all this?’

‘I know more. I know about the murdered overseers in Virginia.’

‘I will murder you, too, by——’

‘No, you will not, because I shall shoot you before you get the chance. I know more still. I know what you pretend—that you are married to this lady——’

‘So I was—in Newgate.’

‘Yes; but I know that you were married already.’



'IF YOU MOVE, I SHALL FIRE.'

‘Who are you? Who are you?’

‘Never mind who I am. Now, I have had enough of you. Go! You are a common housebreaker—I have caught you in the act. Fly, or I fire! Fly, I say’—he raised the pistol—‘or I fire and settle the business at once.’

‘I want money.’

‘Then I must pull this bell, which awakens the servants. You will have no money to-night.’

The man hesitated for a minute.

‘I will go,’ he said slowly.

‘Stop. You are liable to be hanged. Perhaps—I don’t say—I may help you to escape the gallows for this time. Now then. It is dangerous for you to be seen in any street of London. Keep where you are. Lie snug. Have you anyone you can trust as messenger? You sent a woman this morning, a woman in rags—a woman not to be allowed in a decent house. Have you no better messenger?’

‘There’s an Irishman—a man from Dublin. He’s in trouble, too, but he would run an errand for me if I asked him.’

‘Send your Irishman, then, and he shall tell you what you are to do. Send him in the morning about ten or so.’

‘I’ve got no money.’

‘Tell your messenger that. But keep snug. If you stir abroad you will be seen and recognised. Keep snug. You deserve nothing but hanging. I tell you this for your own good. Stop! Remember that we are not going to allow this annoyance to continue. We can put an end to it by your hanging, and, if necessary, you shall hang. Do you hear? You shall hang! Now go!’

The man disappeared as he had come. In the morning one of the servants observed that a window at the back was open. She said that she had shut and bolted it.

Isabel crept out, hearing no more voices.

‘Oh!’ she cried. ‘Have you persuaded him?’

‘He will give you no more trouble, madam. Rest quite easy. As we agreed, it will perhaps be better not to have the man hanged just yet. Perhaps not at all. I would rather send him back to Africa, where there would seem to be a wholesome certainty that a powerful man with a taste for housebreaking and murder very speedily meets with such an end as should satisfy all his friends. But, indeed, you shall hear no more of him, whatever happens.’

Isabel heaved a deep sigh.

‘Oh! you make me happy again. You have seen me in my deepest humiliation. After many days my sins have found me out. What shall I do—what can I do in gratitude to you for saving my good name?’

CHAPTER XIX

FEMINA FURENS

IN the morning the Irish refugee again presented himself at the White Dog. The parlour of the tavern was occupied by half a dozen sailors, sitting idly about, having nothing to do on shore. They were mostly silent and ill at ease in consequence of the evening's debauch. This, however, is too common an occurrence among them to cause any attention either from the patient or his friends. Among them, however, was the woman called Doll, who was occupied with the toasting of a couple of red herrings for her man. Everybody knows that there is no better breakfast, after a skinful of punch, rum, gin, or beer, than a red herring roasted till he is hot through and through, buttered, and served with a slice of bread and a tankard of small ale.

The Irishman saluted the woman, after the pleasant manner of his country, in honeyed tones.

'Sure,' he said, 'its scorchin' and burnin' your pretty cheeks ye are with them red herrings. Let go the griddle, now, and I'll finish them for ye. Sit ye down and wait till I hand 'em over. So—that's right.'

He took the instrument out of her hands. There is no woman, not even if she resembles poor bruised Doll, and belongs to her class, who may not be mollified by

being complimented on her looks and relieved of her work. Nor does it require any great skill in flattery. Quite clumsy practitioners will make fools of women by regiments with a few fine words costing nothing.

‘Truth,’ the exile from Erin went on, ‘a better cook than myself ye won’t find in all Dobblun. And where’s the good man this morning? Lying snug?’ he whispered, looking round the room. ‘He can’t be too snug. For why? The news of his return is spread abroad. I heard ’em, as I came along, talking about him. There’s a reward out for him. They are already on the job looking about for him. Let him lie snug.’

‘For how long? He can’t stay upstairs in his bedroom all his life.’

‘He can’t, my pretty! You’re as wise as you are good-lookin’. He can’t lie in his room all his life. That’s a wise thing to find out, and a wise thing to say. Now, I reckon that he depends upon your advice, doesn’t he? If he’s a prudent man, he will depend upon you more and more. My word, Doll—your name is Doll, isn’t it? If not, no offence meant. My word! there’s rocks ahead for him!’

‘On my advice? Why, he’s the most masterful man, for his colour, that ever you saw. It’s his own advice he takes, and if you venture to say a word to the contrary, it’s up with his fist and down you go. Not that I complain. They’re all alike—ready with a word and a blow; but none of the women has got a properer man than myself. And a black eye—what odds is a black eye, or two, for the matter of that?’

‘You’re right, Doll: there isn’t a properer man in all London. And I don’t believe there was a properer man in all Virginia. Well, you must take care of him.’

‘He’ll lie snug here, p’r’aps, if you tell him. He thinks a lot of you already. He said last night that you were as honest a man as he had come across all his life.’

‘There’s other things to take care about, Doll.’ The Irishman turned the herrings, and dropped his voice, speaking over his shoulder. ‘Not that I should be called to speak about such things. There’s other dangers besides Newgate. Oh, I know nothing! but when a man is so well set up—such a fine figure of a man, as one may say, with such white teeth and such fiery eyes—other women finds him out, says you—ah! you know why; you’ve got eyes in your head—other women finds him out as well as you.’

‘What do you mean? My man won’t dare so much as to look at any other woman when I’m about.’

‘These herrings are about done, Doll. They shouldn’t be toasted too dry. Give me the butter—a good lump of butter—and a knife. I’ll carry them up to his room. Fetch me half a loaf and a jug of small ale—a quart jug, Doll. He’ll drink two, at least, after last night. Other dangers, says you. Oh, I know! Give me two quart jugs.’

‘What do you mean about other women?’

‘Nothing, Doll—nothing. What could I mean? Only what every woman must expect—even a fine figure of a woman like yourself. Well . . . keep him snug—keep him snug, as you say. Where’s his room?’

‘It’s upstairs. What do you mean, then, by your talk about other women?’ She stood still, her lips parted, her cheek blushing, her eyes brightened.

The Irishman nodded mysteriously, without making any reply, and carried the food upstairs. Adolphus Truxo

half dressed, was sitting on the truckle-bed which formed all the furniture of the room.

‘The top of the marnin’ to ye,’ said Oliver cheerily. ‘Here’s your red herrin’ and your beer; I tuk them from Doll. And, now, do ye want a message sent? Because I’ll go if you like. I’d do more than that for a brave man like you.’

The man took a long pull at the small ale, and sighed heavily.

‘Last night,’ he said, ‘after you went away, I had a discourse with a gentleman.’

‘Here?’

‘Who the devil said it was here?’

‘I don’t care where it was, then. Did the gentleman know what had happened?’

‘He did. He knew everything. How he learned it I don’t know. If he knows, other people may know. He knows everything. If he knows, how did he get to learn it? Who else knows it? He knows about—about’—the man looked round the room suspiciously—‘he knows about them overseers. He was a good sort of gentleman, too. He gave me a warning. “Keep snug,” he said, “keep snug, unless you want to be hanged.” That’s what he said. I don’t want to be hanged, no more do you—what’s your name?—I’ve forgotten your name. Give me the other jug. “Unless you want to be hanged.” That’s what he said. “Do you want to be hanged?”’

‘Brother’—the Irishman sat on the bed beside him in a friendly and fraternal spirit. Who would mistrust so open-hearted, so sympathetic a comrade?—‘we’re in the same boat. If they catch me they’ll stretch me, same as you. Only they don’t know me, ye see, and they do know you. So the gentleman said you were to be hung. Well, if

he said so much as that, he won't lay information. Why, it's £20 to the informer in a case of a runaway; what it is for a murderer I don't know. Informers don't tell you beforehand. Besides, if he's a real gentleman he won't take a reward.'

'Hush! Be quiet. Don't talk so loud. Someone may be listening.'

His friend, the sympathetic refugee, opened the door and looked out cautiously.

'There's no one. You're quite safe here, unless the landlord or one of the pot-boys should turn informer. A man is never safe. But you must trust someone. What about that message? I want to earn a shilling if I can. I haven't got such a thing upon me, even, as a token.'

'Well, then, can you write?'

'Sorra a bit.'

'No more can't I. We must do without, then. Yesterday I got one of the pot-boys to write. But I'm afraid to trust him; he looked suspicious. Go to St. James's Square—it's at the other end of the town—the house is number 25. Can you read numbers?'

'If I can't, somebody in the Square can, sure.'

'Number 25, then. Find the house; ask to see Mrs. Weyland; don't forget the name—Weyland.'

'I'll try to remember—Weyland—Mrs. Weyland.'

'She's a young woman and a fine woman—as fine a woman as ever you see. I married her once. It's about three years ago now.' He made the announcement as if it was quite a common thing for a black in his station of life to marry a gentlewoman.

'Did you now?' asked the Irishman, with apparent admiration. 'Married her, did you? Married her? To be sure, you look like a man who would have more wives

than one—as many wives as he wants. Does Doll know?’

‘What does it matter if she does know it? I done no harm to Doll. Why, I’d married her as well a year or two before. A man like me may have as many wives as he likes, I believe.’

‘I’ve got one in Cork, and another in Dobblun, not to speak of a mighty fine girl waiting for me in Tipperary. But then for a figure of a man I’m not a patch upon you.’

‘The way of it was this: I married the lady when I was under sentence of death in Newgate. She gave me my fill of rum in return. I thought nothing of it, no more did Doll after I’d knocked her down. I was pricked for Tyburn on the Monday after, and I never hoped to get off. But there were too many of us, and they were bound to let off some, so they sent me to Virginia.’

‘You told me all this last night.’

‘My lady was such a beautiful creature, with cheeks like an apple and eyes like melting—melting candles; I would not disappoint her, and so I never sent her word that I wasn’t hanged after all. Why should I? Besides, I thought that perhaps I should never get away. Well, there it is, and she’s my wife—my lawful wife—one of my lawful wives. They tell me that all her property is mine. Well, you ask to see Mrs. Weyland. There’s footmen at the door—they’ll be for refusing you admission. Say it’s about a poor man—an unfortunate sailor from Wapping, who’s lost his arms and his legs; say it’s an act of charity; say that you’ll sit down on the doorstep and wait till she comes out; say that you’ll fight the best man of the lot. Presently they’ll let you go in.’

‘What am I to say when I am in?’

‘You’re just to tell madam that you come from me, her

friend in Great Hermitage Street : that he—that is, me—saw the gentleman who had the pistols last night : that he—that is, me—is going to follow his advice : that she's got nothing to fear from me : that I won't get into the house any more : and that I'll lay snug until such time as the gentleman tells me what to do.'

The Irishman repeated this message correctly after several attempts.

'I'll remember all that. Anything more?'

'Tell her that I've got no money, and that I'd be thankful for some. Otherwise I shall be turned into the streets.'

'Is that all?'

'That's all : and hark ye, my lad : I've only known you since last night. If so be you don't treat me square in the matter of the money. . . . I——'

He half rose and growled like a bull in the field.

'Brother,' the Irishman interrupted with emotion, 'we're in the same boat ; both of us are keeping out of the way. You can trust me. I'll bring you back all the money I get. Never fear, and I'll fight the best man of the lot. Damme, I'll fight any two ; I'll sit on the doorstep till they let me in, and I'll make up so long a yarn that the sweet young thing will be glad to send you the money.'

So he went off with a light footstep. He might be an enemy of the laws, but his appearance and his conversation conveyed confidence. To all appearance he had not washed his face since the previous evening, for it still presented the stains, as it were, of the work in which he had been last engaged. Nor had he combed his ragged locks, which still hung down upon his shoulders in a tangled mass—which certainly had not seen the comb for a long time. Otherwise a sprightly and a cheerful working man.

He was gone about three hours. When he returned it was close upon noon, and Doll was again occupied with the gridiron, cooking a beefsteak for the dinner of her lord. The parlour was by this time quite empty and deserted.

‘Ye can tell him I’ve come back, Doll.’ Again he took the gridiron from her hands. ‘For a tender steak there’s no country like ould Oirland, be sure. Ye can run upstairs, Doll, and tell him I’ve brought the money. Ah, Doll,’ he murmured while he turned the steak, ‘she’s a lovely creature over there’—he jerked his thumb in a westerly direction—‘a most lovely creature.’

‘Who is? What lovely creature are you talking about?’

‘Why, you were there yourself yesterday. Didn’t you see her? I thought you knew her already. Oh! If you don’t know her—well—no offence, Doll. This is a very fine steak.’

‘What lovely creature? Speak, ye Irish devil! What lovely creature?’

Doll’s temper was quickly roused; it was dangerous to converse with her upon lovely creatures.

‘I thought you knew. Why, Doll, the woman—she’s an angel to look at—the woman in St. James’s Square; she’s dressed up as fine as a goddess, and she’s got the sweetest smile you ever seen.’

‘What woman? Speak, or I’ll brain you with the frying pan.’

Indeed, she looked as if she was quite capable of this unfeminine action.

‘Why, Doll, I suppose I ought not to have spoken. O’ course, I thought you knew all about her. Very likely now, after all, there’ll be nothing betwixt them. It is the

woman who gives him money. You went for it yourself yesterday, and they put you out of the door.'

'She—gives—him—money? I went for it? Why, he never told me it was a woman that the letter was wrote for. What does she give him money for? Tell me that. What does she give him money for?'

'How should I know? Hark ye, Doll: I've a liking for you, and I'll just tell you what I think. Keep your hands off o' me, or I won't tell you nothin'. There isn't a lady in all the land who wouldn't take such a fine man as yours from you if she could—not a lady, mind.'

'I know the house—I remember where it is; I'll go there. I'll find her in her own great house; I'll murder her! Oh, I'll knife her! Oh!' she hissed in her wrath.

'Come, Doll, I wouldn't do that. If you knife the lady you will only bring yourself to the gallows—and for nothing—and you'll bring him to the gallows as well. Where's the sense in getting hanged, the pair of you? It will be too late asking that question when you and your fine man are setting off to Tyburn in the same cart.'

'I don't care if I do get hanged. Well, if I don't knife the woman I will go and give information about the man. I will have him hanged. He shall go to Tyburn, with his going after fine women! I'll teach him! I'll teach him! Thank the Lord! I know enough to get him hanged twice over.'

'I wouldn't do it, Doll; I wouldn't do it. Now, I'll tell you a much better thing to do.'

'What's that?'

'Take him clean away from her—that's a better way. Keep him to yourself, Doll.'

For a while Doll stood out for murder. She gave full play to the emotion of jealousy; she tramped about the

room ; she swung her arms ; she brandished the knife with which she had trimmed the steak ; she swore that she would stick it into the vital parts of her rival ; she pictured the immense effect of the example she would make of a woman who took another woman's man ; she would follow up the lesson by plunging the same knife into the ribs of her lord and master.

'Doll,' said the Irishman, 'long before you'd get the knife between his ribs you'd be on the ground with your arms and your legs and your backbone bruk, and lucky if your neck wasn't bruk as well.'

'Then I'll go out in the street and I'll give information. I'll say: "Did you want Adolphus Truxo—him as was sentenced to be hanged three years ago for housebreaking, and was sent to the plantations for life? Because I know where he is, the villain! And he murdered all the overseers in Virginnny before he got away, and if you'll come with me I'll show you where to lay hands upon him."'

'No, Doll. You won't do that. You won't have him hanged, because when a man's hanged he's no good any more to nobody. You'll just take him away from her. Now, Doll, be reasonable and listen.'

Doll paused in her mad tramp round the room. Her cheeks were purple ; her eyes were flaming ; she showed her teeth like a tigress ; she clenched her fist and she clawed the air alternately—in a word, she was the jealous woman, entirely abandoned to rage and resentment, seeking the injury of an unfaithful man.

'How do you know,' the Irishman went on, 'that she's taken him from you? This very morning I saw her'—the Irishman had a free imagination, because he had not in reality been further west than Drury Lane, where he had seen his friend the actor, and set certain little things about

his disguise in better order—"I saw her, I say, this morning. "Tell me," she says, "how's Mr. Truxo? It's a fine man he is, and no mistake." "True for you, my lady," I says. As to her face and figure, if you'll believe me, Doll, she's not to be compared with you. "Is he in the White Dog still?" she asks. "Madam," I says, "he is, and likely to remain there." "I would help him if I could," she said, "because he is such a fine figure of a man. And I am astonished," she says—"astonished I am," she says, "to think that he's remained unmarried so long. Believe me," she says, "there's plenty of women would take pity on him—I myself—but I mustn't say so." So, you see, Doll, she believes that he's not yet married.'

'She must be a fool, then!'

'She must. Most of the women are fools. That's how they're made; they understand nawthin', being, as you said—ye are the wise woman, Doll—mostly fools.'

'Have you got anything more to tell me about her?'

'This, Doll. If we can make her understand that your man is married already, she'll give him up. Not, mind you, that there's anything so far between them. These rich women have their fancies, same as the likes of you, Doll. She gets to know this fine man, and she gives him money; she says that she's astonished that he's not married, and she would take pity on um. Well, Doll, there you are! Only let me prove to her that you are his wife, and there's an end——'

'I told you that I am his wife.'

'You did, Doll, you did. Suppose I was to go to her and to say, "Doll's his wife, and the proof is that she fetched me a box o' the ear enough to knock my head off." But we want better proof than that, Doll.'

'I can't give up my marriage-lines.'

‘No, and I don’t want you to. Tell me only when and where you were married. That will be quite enough.’

‘That’s easy enough : I was married in Shadwell Church five years ago, the ninth of July.’

‘Five years ago : in the month of July : in Shadwell Church. That’s enough, Doll ; they can look in the book if they like. And, now, don’t let him see that you’re jealous, because the man’s made so as he’d be angered if he saw that you were jealous ; and when he’s angered—if I were you, Doll, I wouldn’t anger him. You know what he’s like when his temper gets the better of him. I wouldn’t anger him if I was you. So that’s all right, isn’t it?’

‘I suppose so,’ she replied sullenly. ‘He has been there.’

‘Perhaps he has. Perhaps he hasn’t. But he won’t go there any more. I know that he won’t. And why? Because it’s a dangerous place for him to visit. So, Doll, so. There isn’t a more sensible woman than you in the whole world, and there’s to be no sticking with knives, is there? And no going to the house and calling names? Because, you see, Doll, after all, you’d do no good—only anger him the more. And no giving information to the thief-taker and the informer either, because, you see, it would be a terrible thing for you, of all people in the world, to bring this man of yours—all your own—to the gallows. You’d never forgive yourself, and bad luck would follow you all the rest of your life.’

‘No, I won’t lay information. But she’s got to give him up.’

‘She will, she will. When she knows the truth there’s nothing she will desire more than to give him up. Now, Doll, the steak is done to a turn. I’ll carry it up. And, hark ye, not a word of this talk. What he’d do to you I

know. As for me, I can keep out of his way, but I'd rather not. I'd like to run his errands and to do for him—until I can get a job.'

He carried the steak on a hot pewter platter upstairs to the man lying snug.

'Well,' he asked, 'have you got the money?'

'I've got five guineas. Here it is for you.'

'And you saw the lady?'

'I've seen the lady. She's a fine woman—as ever I saw. But she's dangerous.'

'How dangerous?'

"'Tell the man," she says, "that he's got to do what he's told. I know all about him; a word from me will have him hanged. And tell him that he was not married to me, because he had a wife already. Doll is her name, and he was married in Shadwell Church five years ago, in the month of July," she says.'

'How did she know that?'

'I can't tell you. That's what she said. And here's your money. Five guineas she sends you. You're to make it last a long time, she says. Give me a shilling. I wouldn't rob you, and a shilling is all I want for my own trouble. Thank you.'

'Come and drink about this evening!' The negro rattled the coins with the natural cheerfulness of anticipating unbounded rum for himself and his friends.

Be careful, mate,—be very careful. I wouldn't go downstairs if I was you. They seem honest lads, but no one can tell. There is talk of a negro runaway from Virginia; I heard people in the street talking of a hue-and-cry and the reward. It's a pot of money for anyone, mind you.'

'So 'tis. So 'tis.'

‘There may be some of them down below—but who knows? Brother, if I was you, I’d lay up here snug and quiet. Get your drink up the stairs, and your supper. Doll will do all that for you. Drink by yourself for a day or two. Lay up. Lay up a bit.’

So saying, he departed, leaving Mr. Truxo to such enjoyment of his steak as was consistent with the newly awakened apprehension of betrayal. He had also filled the heart of one of Truxo’s wives with a fire of jealousy, ready on the smallest provocation to burst into a flame, so that he came away with the consciousness of having done a good morning’s work at the expense of a little exercise of the imagination.

As for the negro, he sat alone in his own room, a prey to the direst terrors, and drinking continuously in order to put out of sight that narrow courtyard with which he was already familiar, and the thought of the triangular tree along the Oxford Road which rose up before him in his waking hours and in his dreams.

CHAPTER XX

WITH MR. PINDER

THE pressing danger being relieved, or rather removed, in this quarter, and Mr. Truxo reduced to a trembling obedience, Oliver next turned his attention to the other, the less important danger, threatening from the bankrupt, who, after languishing in thirsty penury so long, had now found a shelter under the hospitable roof of the Grapes. Here his bill for drink—for that on account of solid food was insignificant—was mounting at incredible speed, assisted by the kindly encouragement of the landlord, who pressed upon his guest the finest and most costly contents of his cellar.

Perhaps the lawyer had private reasons of his own for defeating the purposes of the noble lord, Isabel's brother-in-law, from whom he had endured many flouts and insolences—such, namely, as a man of rank too often knows how to inflict upon one below him in station without risk of retaliation or retort. It is an unworthy use of the privileges of rank, which should be accompanied by courtesy and consideration. Perhaps, as a general rule, it might be advanced that the more worthless a man of Quality is, either in morals or in understanding, the more arrogant and exacting of respect he will be found, so that a nobleman who has nothing at all to recommend him but his

hereditary rank—neither statesmanship, nor eloquence in the House of Lords, nor honourable service in the army, nor leadership of any kind, nor morals nor principles, nor the record of an honourable and virtuous life—will attempt to carry off his true obscurity by the assumption of pride and insolence.

In his treatment of Oliver Lord Stratherrick had been especially arrogant, because he foresaw the possibility, which he would endeavour to prevent, if possible, of a closer tie than that of friendship between him and Isabel. Oliver endured this insolence because he was unwilling to quarrel with one so nearly allied with the lady. But, when the occasion arrived, it was but human, it was but natural, that he should seize upon the opportunity in order to defeat the schemes of this degraded peer.

It was certain that Lord Stratherrick, with the basest ingratitude towards the lady who maintained him, was keeping this bankrupt at his former valet's tavern in order to make money for himself by professing to buy his silence—a scheme truly worthy of his race and his ancestry. Now, therefore, Oliver, as soon as he was free to do so, began to consider the situation with care. The case, he found, might be stated in plain language in some such words as these :

There was an ill-conditioned, drunken creature who had so often declared Mrs. Weyland to be the prime cause of all his misfortunes that he had at last ended by believing it. This man was revengeful, and might be trusted to take his revenge if he could. He knew, for instance, the history of the Newgate marriage, and might blazon it out for all the world to hear.

He might talk, therefore. It was certain, in fact, that he would talk. Now, if he talked anywhere in the town

except at the Grapes Tavern it would not matter. This house, however, was used by a great many servants and valets and lackeys of the Court end of town; any scandal related to them would quickly, by means of the ladies'-maids, be spread abroad over the whole of the world of fashion. This was an event to be averted, if possible.

That he had not, so far, spoken was certain, because there was no sign of any such scandal anywhere. The safety of Mrs. Weyland lay in the fact that this man was for the most part, and always in the latter part of the day, stupid with drink—sometimes half speechless and sometimes wholly speechless. If he continued in this condition he would never be able to cause any scandal at all.

There was also safety in the fact that, in the morning, when his mind, muddled at best, was at its clearest, no one was in the tavern at all. Again, the man certainly understood, if he could understand anything at all, that his delightful access to all kinds of drink was the price of his silence. He must certainly understand that if he spoke at all the whole value of his silence would be at once destroyed.

Further, the man was taken in at the tavern by order of his lordship. But his lordship had no money to pay the bill for the man's maintenance. Therefore, if Isabel refused to pay anything either to her brother-in-law or to Mr. Pinder, the landlord, the man must be turned into the street, where he would be harmless.

Or, again, if Lord Stratherrick himself, in revenge, started the scandal, he could be sent back to his deserted country house by the withdrawal of the allowance. But if Isabel refused to pay Fulton's bill, the landlord might start the scandal on his own account. The man had already called upon Isabel and demanded payment. On

the whole, the only person to be feared in the business seemed to be this landlord, and he only to the extent of this bill. There was nothing except the tavern bill to prevent Isabel from defying the whole gang of conspirators, if they might be so called.

Considering, therefore, the whole case thus presented, Oliver decided that the wisest thing for him to do was to go behind his lordship's back and to discuss the case with Mr. Pinder direct. Perhaps the slight upon Lord Stratherrick recommended this line of conduct additionally. It would certainly make that nobleman very angry.

Oliver, therefore, called at the tavern in the afternoon. Mr. Pinder was in his parlour, the room behind the bar where the company met every evening. He was seated at the table, his account-books before him. In an elbow-chair beside the fireplace sat a man, huddled up, chin buried in chest, fast asleep. By his purple cheek, his nose swollen and painted, his protruding lip, his hands, which trembled in his sleep, Oliver recognised the bankrupt Fulton, object of so much solicitude.

'Your friend,' he observed to Mr. Pinder, on opening the conversation, 'appears to be dangerously near an apoplectic fit. A swollen neck, short and thick; a bloated face; shaking hands—what do these things mean, sir? He should take care: he is ripe for the scythe unless I am much mistaken.'

This was obviously true; yet men in this drunken condition do sometimes so continue for many years; it is as if the fatal shears were always open for them, and always kept from closing, in order that they might repent and reform. This man, however, never thought of repentance or of reformation; he felt no prickings of conscience; his conscience was dead; he suffered no remorse for his wasted

life—none for the neglect of wife and children, none for the ruin he had brought upon himself. Hundreds or thousands there are in this town of creatures thus besotted and bemused, who can no longer think, or understand, or act, and are mere breathing casks of drink, to whom small ale is cool and rum punch is hot, and there is no other delight or longing or desire left in life but the coolness of the one and the sweet heat and strength of the other.

‘He will do—he will do. Let him be,’ said Mr. Pinder impatiently. ‘You wish to speak to me, sir? You can do so without fear of waking this man. A cannon fired beside him would not awaken him out of such a sleep as his.’

‘If I mistake not,’ said Oliver, ‘this is the very man concerning whom I have come to see you, Mr. Pinder. This is, I should say, from the description I have received of him, Mr. Fulton, formerly of Ludgate Hill.’

‘It is Mr. Fulton, sir—none other—and a most unfortunate and most worthy gentleman. He was once, as you have been, no doubt, informed, a substantial tradesman of Ludgate Hill.’

‘Of his misfortunes I have no doubt. Concerning his worth, those who know him, I believe, differ in opinion.’

‘That’s as may be, sir. You come, however, to see me about him. What have you to say, sir? Do you come from a certain lady not a hundred miles from St. James’s Square?’

Oliver gazed curiously upon the sleeping man, whose appearance was certainly against him.

‘He looks like a gentleman of sterling worth—does he not?’

This, then, was the person, the father of Alice, who was

making so much trouble and lending himself to those who would use his misfortunes for their own profit.

‘Well, sir, before we discourse about Mr. Fulton,’ said Pinder, ‘or before we discourse about anything at all, perhaps you will kindly give me your name and your reasons for calling upon me.’

‘As for my name, it is Macnamara. I am a lawyer—a member of the Inner Temple.’

Mr. Pinder sprang to his feet.

‘No, sir; I will not have to do with any lawyer. What has a lawyer to do with Mr. Fulton or with me? I want no lawyer meddling in my affairs.’

‘I respect your prejudices, Mr. Pinder. Lawyers are, as you say, sometimes meddlesome. But in this case I fear that you must discuss the matter with a lawyer. I come from the Honourable Mrs. Weyland, a lady whose name you have heard, whom, indeed, you have seen, in connection with certain proposals of Lord Stratherrick concerning this gentleman—this unfortunate and, as you assure me, most worthy gentleman who is now asleep before us.’

‘Well, sir, there is no harm, I believe, in acknowledging that I do know her ladyship by name—and by reputation—and that I have had the honour of speech with her. Mr. Fulton, however, knows more about her than I myself.’

‘Perhaps. It is also certain that Mr. Fulton pretends to more knowledge than he possesses.’

‘In what way, sir?’

‘In several ways. I have no objection at all, Mr. Pinder, to let you know some of them. I am not an attorney, and am here as a friend of the lady, not as a lawyer. For instance, Mr. Fulton charges the lady with being the cause of his bankruptcy. Now, he was already

bankrupt, as can be proved, when he tried to get payment of a debt not due for six months to come, with the intention of defrauding his creditors.'

'Well, sir, that may be so. You say so; perhaps it is so. But I know nothing about it, and I am not concerned with the fact.'

'Perhaps not. He also pretends that the lady was married in Newgate to a condemned felon in order to shift her debts to the back of that creature. You are, I believe, concerned with that allegation, Mr. Pinder, else you would not allow him the run of your cellars. Come, now, consider.'

'Pretends? Why, she *was* married to such a man. He was a negro named Truxo, who was hanged for house-breaking.'

'That is one of the points on which he, and therefore you, Mr. Pinder, and your noble friend Lord Stratherrick, are imperfectly informed.'

Mr. Pinder pushed back his chair.

'Sir,' he said, 'have a care, lawyer or no lawyer. It is perfectly certain that the lady was married in Newgate.'

The lawyer smiled.

'Dear me! to observe how people believe things! Now, Mr. Pinder, it is, on the other hand, quite certain that she was not married in Newgate. Mrs. Weyland has never been married to anyone except the late Honourable Ronald Weyland, Lord Stratherrick's brother.'

'Then, sir, why did not Mr. Fulton issue a writ for the arrest of his debtor?'

'First, probably, because he thought she was married; next, perhaps, because, as I have already pointed out, it was not his debt, but was a debt due to his creditors.'

‘This is a very strange story, sir—very strange—let me tell you, and it wants confirmation.’

‘Perhaps. Now, Mr. Pinder, your affairs as regards this man are, to a certain extent, in my hands, as a friend of Mrs. Weyland, not as a lawyer. As I said before, I am not an attorney. When the time comes for an attorney to intervene, I may be retained—perhaps, I say. But at present there is no attorney. You keep this man—Lord Stratherrick and you—in a kind of peaceful heaven—the only heaven the poor devil is likely to know; you keep him in captivity, so to speak; you keep him drunk, in order to insure his silence, which you propose to sell to Mrs. Weyland, and to keep on selling it as long as this man shall be spared the end which certainly awaits him—that is to say, the apoplectic fit of the drunkard.’

‘I don’t know, sir, that I am obliged to discuss this business with you.’

Mr. Pinder sat back in his chair and folded his hands sulkily. He did not at all like the look of the matter thus presented.

‘You are not obliged to discuss the matter. Keep silence, by all means, if you wish. I would, however, remind you, Mr. Pinder, that your friend here—your unfortunate and most worthy friend—has already run up a considerable bill—I should say a very considerable bill—for drink and maintenance, especially the former; and that if you look to Lord Stratherrick for payment of that bill you will be disappointed.’

‘I do not think that I shall be disappointed. Quite the contrary. My bill will be paid; of that I am assured.’

‘You think so. You still look to Mrs. Weyland for the payment of this bill, and for a certain sum of money which you will share with his lordship.’

‘Well——’ Mr. Pinder changed countenance. ‘Of course, when my bill is paid there will be some compensation to this poor man for all his suffering.’

‘Pray go on thinking so if it makes you happy. Meantime I can assure you that Mrs. Weyland will give nothing for compensation—nothing, either to you or to her brother-in-law. As regards your bill, it will be for you to decide how long you will keep the man out of your compassion and generosity.’

‘His lordship will pay me, if Mrs. Weyland refuses.’

‘His lordship? Really? From what funds? From what income? You were once his valet; you knew his private circumstances. What income has he, except what his sister-in-law allows him? Understand, Mr. Pinder, that if his lordship gives any trouble in this matter his allowance will be at once stopped, and he will have to go back to the country. You have to deal with Mrs. Weyland, not with Lord Stratherrick—that is, with me—in this matter. I represent the lady, who will act by my advice, and I have advised her to give nothing.’

Mr. Pinder dropped his hands and stared.

‘Give his lordship nothing?’ he gasped. ‘Nothing for compensation of this poor gentleman?’

‘Nothing. Nothing at all.’

‘His lordship informs me, on the other hand, that the lady will give him all he asks.’

‘You are acquainted, of old, Mr. Pinder, with Lord Stratherrick. You are also acquainted with his present circumstances. What do you think, now, when you look at these circumstances? Why should Mrs. Weyland be frightened into giving money? By this drunken hog? By Lord Stratherrick, her dependent? By you? Think, Mr. Pinder—think!’

‘Then, who is to repay me for my outlay on this drunken hog, as you call him?’

‘This most worthy and unfortunate gentleman, as you call him? Mr. Pinder, I really do not know. I very much fear that you may lose the whole.’

‘Somebody will have to pay. Somebody shall pay, if I go into court with the case.’

‘As you please. You received your orders from his lordship. You cannot make a noble lord pay. You cannot put him into a debtors’ prison. Surely, Mr. Pinder, you know so much. His rank protects him. Certainly, Mrs. Weyland did not order the maintenance of this man.’

Mr. Pinder groaned.

‘If this is true——’ he began.

‘It is quite true. I am commissioned by the lady herself, I tell you again, to present the facts for your consideration.’

‘His bill is tremendous. No one would believe that a man could run up such a bill for drink as this man has done in so short a time.’

‘His appearance seems to indicate considerable powers where drinking is concerned—that is to say, when he is awake.’

‘He is always drinking. I have taken him into the house—at the request of my lord—and I give him the run of the cellars—also at his request. He doesn’t trouble the kitchen much; but the cellars—the cellars—why, the man is like a sponge. He would empty the biggest cellars in London in a few months. He begins in the early morning with purl; all the forenoon he drinks wine by the pint, unless it is beer, which he sometimes prefers to wine, as cooler to the stomach; he never eats any dinner,

only calls for what there is, and turns it over on the plate, and sends it away and calls for more drink. In the afternoon, as you see, he sleeps off some of the drink; in the evening he drinks punch till he is speechless, when the boys drag him upstairs and lay him on the bed. Drunk? He is drunk all day and all night. He is never truly sober for an instant.'

'If I wanted to speak with him, is there not an hour in the day when he is less drunk than at other times?'

'I suppose he is soberest at seven in the morning. He wakes in good time, and he comes downstairs looking about him for a jug of small ale.'

'An expensive guest.'

'Well, sir, *who* is to pay my bill?'

'That,' said Oliver, 'is the difficulty. You can hardly expect Mrs. Weyland to pay it, seeing that the man is entertained solely on the chance of getting money from her.'

'But, sir, if I cannot get the bill paid I stand to lose a large sum.'

'A large sum. I fear so, indeed—unless, of course, you come to terms with me.'

'Terms? Terms with you? What may your terms be?'

Mr. Pinder's expressive countenance had a limited range of expression: it might be cunning, it might be suspicious, it might be threatening. It had been all three in the course of this conversation. Now it began again, with suspicion.

'My terms are not hard. First of all, the man must be turned into the street.'

'If my bill is paid—he goes out this minute.'

Mr. Pinder made as if he would waken the sleeper. Oliver motioned him back.

‘We will come to your bill afterwards. Do not waken the poor wretch before the time. Let him go on drinking to-day. In the morning, at seven, I will call here and try to get speech with him.’

‘Certainly, sir—certainly. That can be done.’

‘Very good. Now we come to the bill. Leave out the question of compensation altogether. Let me hear the amount you propose to charge for the man’s lodging, drink, and maintenance.’

Mr. Pinder turned over the leaves of his book.

‘Lodging, at a shilling a night—a shilling?’ He looked up at the lawyer, a world of cunning in his eye. ‘I meant two shillings a night.’

‘Say one shilling. It is dear—very dear. One shilling might be allowed. But go on.’

‘Food—dinner and supper—at two shillings and sixpence each.’ The lawyer shook his head. ‘The food for the most part spoiled, not eaten—say five shillings a day for that item. Service of chambermaid, boots, pot-boy—at two shillings a day.’

‘Dear—very dear. Not to be allowed. But go on.’

‘Drink—ah! there I fear you will kick. Yet the charges at the Grapes are notorious for their moderation. I find that, taking one day with another, it works out at nine shillings and sixpence a day.’

The lawyer whistled.

‘Nine shillings and sixpence a day? Oho! What a throat! What a swallow! What a godsend to the Grapes! When will you have another such a toper? Well, is that all?’

‘There are out-of-pocket expenses—washing of linen and stockings, money advanced. Small sums. In all, four shillings and twopence.’

‘Moderate, Mr. Pinder. Very moderate.’

‘Would you believe it possible, sir, that one man could drink so much?’

‘It is difficult indeed—almost incredible. The total, if you have made up a total?’

‘The total, sir, is £35 7s. 10d., including yesterday.’ Mr. Pinder glanced curiously and anxiously at the lawyer. ‘This bill is indeed, as you say, sir, moderate.’

‘I did not say moderate, except for the smallest item. Well, sir, it is praiseworthy of you to trust Lord Stratherrick to so large an extent. As you know, his whole allowance for two months would not pay it. To return to a disagreeable subject, therefore. I am sorry to distress you with the question; but as a man of affairs you must have asked yourself the question: what security have you besides his lordship’s verbal order for this debt? No security? I thought not. Consider again: you have not consulted Mrs. Weyland; you called upon her after you had taken in the man, and she warned you. Yet you thought she might be bullied and threatened. You cannot sue her. You may spread abroad libels about pretended marriages, and so find yourself in a criminal court first, and in pillory at the bottom of St. Martin’s Lane next. What will you do then?’

Mr. Pinder was silent. He stood beside the table with hanging hands and downcast face—in silence.

‘I don’t know,’ he replied. ‘I own, sir, that I can do nothing. I listened to his lordship. I might have known that there is not any man in the world whose word can be less trusted than his. I was his valet, and I know him, sir; there is not a more contemptible person in the world, when you have taken away his ribbon and his star. He will cheat and lie and deceive anybody for the sake of a guinea.’

‘He has deceived you in this case, at least, because it is quite certain that he cannot and will not pay your bill.’

Mr. Pinder groaned.

‘Sir, I am at your mercy.’

‘Then we shall probably come to terms. They are these. You will say nothing to your friend here—the worthy and unfortunate gentleman in liquor. For the consideration of part of the debt—not more, but such a part of this debt as Mrs. Weyland may consent to pay—you will transfer to me—to me, mind—this debt of thirty-five pounds odd. You will transfer the whole, understand, to me, in my own name. I buy up this debt for a sum to be agreed upon. If I do not buy it up you will get nothing. I shall send my attorney to you presently, to arrange the business. At seven to-morrow morning I will come here to see the sleeper. Perhaps he will then be able to understand what I have to say, and to speak reasonably. For to-day, Mr. Pinder, let him drink!’

Mr. Pinder administered a savage kick to the legs of the chair on which the sleeping man was sitting.

‘Drunken Beast!’ he said.

So quickly may a worthy and unfortunate gentleman lose his reputation.

CHAPTER XXI

THE WAY TO HIS HEART

THE cockpit called after Gray's Inn, lying on the north side of that venerable Inn of Court and in Gray's Inn Lane, was the place frequented by Lord Stratherrick, at this time of his reduced fortune, every evening. The sport is not, I believe, in any way inferior to that of the more famous cockpit in Tothill Fields; indeed, wherever the birds are set fighting the sport is much the same, because there is the same exhibition of bravery and resolution. And the company is not composed of noble lords and gentlemen, as at Westminster; nor is it so conspicuous for decorum; nor is the betting, without which all sport would be dull and spiritless, so deep and heavy as to be beyond the means of persons impoverished by bad luck, or of those straitened in means, as happens to many at the beginning of their lives. The place itself is like a low round tower to look at outside, but not remarkable for architectural beauty or design; within it is filled with benches, in tiers which rise one above the other, as in an ancient amphitheatre, round a circular stage in the middle. This is the stage where the birds are set to fight.

The company which assembles at the Gray's Inn Cockpit every evening may truly be described as of a mixed

character. As for the noise that they make—as for the shouting, swearing, fighting, and brawling carried on here every evening—it may be called a daily sacrifice offered to the Powers of Evil; those who make it might be called a Rabble Rout; and the cockpit itself might be, and often has been, compared with the Bottomless Pit. At the same time, the frequenters are by no means all of the lower order; they cannot justly be called a mere rabble; the riot and the license are not caused by all alike.

Thus, one may find there decayed gentlemen who have run through their estates, like Lord Stratherrick himself, through too great a devotion to sport and their own fallible judgments; officers who have carried His Majesty's colours over many a field with distinction and the commendation of their commanders; lawyers from Gray's Inn, Lincoln's Inn, and the Temple—lawyers even of the more venerable kind, as Serjeants and King's Counsel, have always loved the sport of cocking; tradesmen from the City, who would be wiser to keep at home and attend to their shops, their customers, and their day-books; young merchants, who should be making up their ledgers and studying the rise and fall of markets; visitors from the country desirous of comparing the cockpits of London with those of their own towns, and jealous of the reputation of the latter; farmers and cattle-drovers in their smock-frocks and with their whips, anxious to show the folk of London how nicely they themselves can judge a bird and its points; skippers of merchant ships, with stories of the cock-fighting in Jamaica and Barbadoes and on the Gold Coast; young bloods of London, mostly half drunk or altogether drunk; butchers in blue—men of this trade are always patrons of every kind of sport; craftsmen in all the trades that are found in Clerkenwell; pickpockets,

footpads, highwaymen, and thief-takers—all these spend most of their ungodly gains in the cockpit, wretches for whom the cart-tail is the only treatment possible, who come to lay or take the odds with whatever stranger will bet with them; who, if they lose, slink away without paying, and, if they win, clamour for instant payment. It is, in a word, a motley and mixed company indeed. Among them may be found every evening certain persons unlike the rest; they do not bet, they do not shout, they are not carried away by the sport; they are of grave and reverend aspect; they might be solid merchants on 'Change, from their manners and their dress; they carry with them bags, and in the bags they carry birds. They are the owners, breeders, and trainers of birds; this is their occupation, this is their livelihood; they fight their birds and sell them. The cockpit is to them what the Royal Exchange is to the merchants of the City—the place in which they make their money. Some of the breeders, it is said, are substantial men; a few of them, even, are rich.

Oliver stood in the upper ring for awhile, looking at the scene with which he was not unfamiliar, because an Irishman loves every kind of sport; it was by no means the first time that he had entered the Gray's Inn Cockpit. Now, however, he looked on with special interest, because he came here on a business errand which greatly concerned one of the company, and was not in any way connected with the sport. If Lord Stratherrick was to be approached in a spirit of conciliation, the cockpit was the most likely place for that purpose.

He presently discovered his lordship sitting in the lowest circle of seats, that, namely, close to the stage or pit, where at the moment a pair of birds was engaged in the

duel which these gallant creatures love and desire quite as much as the men who stimulate them and fire them. It is not cruelty to the birds to set them thus against each other so much as a recognition of the love of battle which distinguishes the game-cock. Lord Stratherrick was watching the combat with face rapt and absorbed; the habitual peevishness had gone out of it; his lower lip no longer proclaimed his discontent by its projection; the insolence of his pride had gone out of him; he no longer looked about him as if the company did not exist; he was transformed into one whose whole soul was engaged, as he most desired, in the sport which he loved still, although it had ruined him. Like all gamesters, had he received a second fortune, he would have wasted and spent it all in the same way as he had wasted and spent the first. He was hardly to be recognised, so transformed he was.

Oliver saw, further, that the people with one consent had accorded to him the best seat, that they did not press upon him or crowd him; yet to other gentlemen in the cockpit they showed no such recognition of station and rank. In this case they respected—could these gamesters choose but respect?—the man who had given to the noble sport of cocking, by means of which they all desired to become rich (but never succeeded), the whole of his estate, the whole of his life, the whole of his thought, and who remained the votary of the sport, even though he had lost everything. This was notorious. They respected, I say, a man who had made of cocking the whole study of his life; who knew as well as the breeders themselves the points of a bird; who had learned how to pick out likely chicks; who knew what one should pay in buying them; who understood the secrets of the business

—it is full of secrets ; how to breed the birds by selection of sire and hen ; how to develop their fighting spirit ; how to feed them ; how to trim their feathers for the fight ; how to fix their spurs ; how to weigh and match the birds ; how to note their marks and their age as well as their weight ; how, in fighting out the main, to take care that only those birds are matched which fall within, or are proved to be within, an ounce of each other in weight. These are very important matters for sportsmen to learn ; and it will be confessed that, since a cockpit is always frequented by those who live and grow rich upon the success of their birds or fall into poverty if their birds are defeated, the presence of such a man—of one who knows the whole game, with its cheats and trickeries—of an umpire, in fact, to see fair play, and to take care that trickery shall not be successful, may be at times most useful. This important function was performed by Lord Stratherrick, by popular suffrage, election, or appointment, by universal consent. The respect with which his opinion was received doubtless helped to reconcile the players to the meagreness of his lordship's bets and the very small amount of his transactions, either in losses or in gains, over the sports. But, then, everybody knew that he was long since completely ruined.

The company respected him ; they all knew him, I say, for a decayed nobleman. They took his bets in shillings and half-crowns with as much outward show of consideration as they observed for those betting in guineas : higher than guineas the betting at the Gray's Inn Cockpit rarely goes.

For his part, while he looked on with the keenest interest, he took no share in the bellowing and bawling of the company ; he sat in silence, unmoved even when the

brawl around him was turned into a fight; or when one who tried to slink away without paying his losses lay half murdered and groaning over broken ribs and battered skull on the floor; or when another who also tried to escape payment was hoisted in a basket to the roof and there hung up exposed to the derision of the house. In all this hubbub Lord Stratherrick sat still and silent, distinguished among the rest, not only by his fine dress, his scarf and his star, but also by the serene contempt with which he regarded the clamour around him as a matter with which he had no concern.

On one side of his lordship sat a fellow in a leathern apron who was a small craftsman of some kind. Presently Oliver, slipping down behind him, touched this man on the shoulder, whispered a few words, and placed a coin in his hand. The man rose and exchanged seats with him. Oliver, therefore, was now sitting beside the man to meet whom he had come to the place. Lord Stratherrick paid no heed to the change; not that he observed nothing, but it was part of his manner to show no kind of interest in any of the company.

Oliver watched for an opportunity. The fight then going on was not one of those which belong to a main; it was a bye fight between two young cocks, still at the age when they can be called stags, and of unequal weight. For some reason—probably connected with rival breeders—the match, quite of minor importance, excited the greatest interest in the house. Everyone was bawling and shouting, cursing, offering, accepting, touching whips, at once. The noise was terrific. Oliver, without thinking it necessary to remind his neighbour that he already knew him, introduced himself in the manner allowed in all places where men assemble for sport.



‘DOES YOUR LORDSHIP CHOOSE TO TAKE THE ODDS?’

‘Does your lordship,’ he asked, ‘choose to lay or to take the odds in this match?’

Without taking his eyes off the birds, this prince of cockers made immediate reply: ‘I will take five to two against the smaller bird.’

Oliver, who, as we have seen, was not unfamiliar with the sport, recognised the old hand in this offer. For, in spite of the clamours of those who backed the stronger and the larger bird, he could very clearly perceive that the other was fresher, better plucked, and of greater spirit than his antagonist. It was not his business, however, to display his own knowledge so much as to humour and please the other man, and in order to do so to lose his money to him.

‘Very well,’ he replied; ‘I will give your lordship five to two against your bird. Shall we say in half-crowns?’ This, observe, was to offer a bet nearly sure to be lost—to give, in fact, longer odds than the case warranted. But the thing was not done in a shout, but quietly; the rest of the company knew and heard nothing of the bet. ‘Very good, my lord. Five to two. Done!’

His lordship said no more. The fight went on. In a few minutes, after the usual sparring, feinting, retreating, and advancing, which lends so much excitement to the fighting of cocks, with the charm of apparent uncertainty, save to those who know the meaning of the game and the powers of the birds, the smaller cock saw his opportunity, sprang upon the neck of his antagonist, and with a single blow of his steel spur laid him dead upon the field.

Then there arose the usual clamour which welcomes the conclusion of a cockfight, with the usual disputes and claims of those who bet.

‘Five half-crowns, my lord.’ Oliver passed them along. ‘I hope your lordship will give me my revenge.’

The evening went on, with more matches; the bye was followed by a main, and Oliver betted with continuous ill-luck—in other words, he showed himself obstinately and all through the evening of opinion always opposite to that of his lordship. When the evening was over, the latter was in the greatest possible good-humour; not only had he won many guineas—all in half-crowns—but he had also proved to this young lawyer the soundness of his own judgment, and the extent of his own knowledge of birds and their powers. Of course, it did not occur to him that his antagonist had come to the place deliberately intending to lose his money for the purpose of subsequent arrangements.

The people rolled out, noisily fighting their battles over again.

‘I am proud to have lost a few bets with so great a cocker as your lordship,’ said Oliver politely. ‘I have had a lesson in the sport. My good opinion of myself is lowered, I confess. But perhaps on some other evening I may be privileged to take another lesson in betting on the birds.’

‘Sir, I am to be found here most evenings. The sport of cockfighting is, I confess, my chief amusement. I find nothing in the world to equal the courage of the birds. They never fight on the cross; they never deceive; they know not trickery—they are, in a word, not in the least like your prize-fighters, your wrestlers, your swordsmen, or your masters of fence.’

‘My lord, I have had the honour of meeting you once or twice at a certain house in St. James’s Square’—Lord Stratherrick affected unconsciousness—‘at the house of the Honourable Mrs. Weyland.’

‘Ay, ay, as you say, sir.’ He resumed at once the cold

and insolent air of the nobleman. Outside the cockpit this manner was habitual with him. 'No doubt, sir, since you say so.'

Oliver was not to be repressed by a simple piece of insolence. Who would think that Lord Stratherrick had sat beside him at the dinner-table a dozen times? 'Since you say so.' What insolence was this! But he swallowed the insult.

'My lord, there is a tavern not far from here, in Covent Garden.' He smiled and bowed, offering this invitation with apparent humility. 'I should be greatly honoured, and so, I am sure, would the company—which is chiefly composed of lawyers, my professional brethren—if your lordship would condescend to take a glass of punch with me. A coach will take us to the place, or we might walk there—'tis in High Holborn—in a few minutes.'

'Sir'—his lordship hesitated, but yielded to the seductiveness of the punch. To drink a bowl of punch at the expense of another man is a consideration when one's allowance is so small. He inclined his head stiffly. 'Sir, I shall be honoured by accepting your invitation.'

After two or three glasses of the punch and listening to two or three songs from the young lawyers who filled the room, Lord Stratherrick began to show a few premonitory signs of approaching cordiality. He was but human. The punch softened him. Besides, he had won those bets.

'Sir,' he said, 'I now remember you. I ask your pardon for not remembering you before. You are Mr. Oliver Macnamara. I meet so many men. There is such an amount of business to be done. Why, sir, I have met you at the house of my sister-in-law on several occasions, if I am right. My sister-in-law is Mrs. Weyland, of St. James's Square. We have met at dinner.'

‘Quite right—on several occasions. Let me offer your lordship another glass of this excellent punch. It is whispered among ourselves, my lord, in our boastful manner, that the lawyer’s wig covers the finest judge of punch; but I fear we must except your lordship. Whether as a judge of birds or a judge of punch, your lordship’s judgment is extraordinary.’

‘Why, sir, you may do so, perhaps, without prejudice, as you lawyers say, to your legitimate claims, and without undue boastfulness on my part. There are exceptions to every rule.’

‘Mrs. Weyland, if one may mention her name with the greatest respect in this company’—Oliver dropped his voice to a whisper—‘your lordship’s sister-in-law, is, I am sorry to say, very unhappy at this moment.’

‘Indeed. Why?’

‘Allow me—another glass. Since your lordship is so good a judge of a glass of punch, you must suffer me to convey to the respectable keeper of this tavern your approval—even your praise. The lady’s unhappiness is, I may tell your lordship in confidence, partly on your account—nay, wholly on your account.’

‘How, sir? Why on my account?’

‘Permit me, my lord—no one listens. In the general flow of discourse we shall not be overheard. I am glad of an opportunity—unexpected as welcome—of laying the matter before your lordship, even in this public place. Your lordship cannot but know the reverential regard with which Mrs. Weyland respects the head of her husband’s family—none other than your own noble person.’

‘Why, sir’—naturally thinking of the smallness of his allowance, which could hardly be called ‘reverential’—‘I

was not aware—— To be sure, my lamented brother may have taught her. But her manner is not always——’

‘Of course, the lady cannot be for ever proclaiming the disposition of her heart. Your lordship will, however, remember that her own family is very much inferior to her late husband’s—her father was only a merchant—which makes her the more ready, perhaps, to recognise the respect due to its leader, even though she does not assure you of the fact every time you address her.’

‘Pray, sir, proceed.’

‘She is, then, uneasy because she imagines that she has in some way forfeited your lordship’s esteem.’

‘Ahem! my esteem!’ His lordship sipped his glass thoughtfully. He could not in the least understand what was meant, because, indeed, that esteem for the head of the family spoken of by Mr. Macnamara had not of late been marked; nay, it had been, on the other hand, conspicuously absent.

‘There are certain passages in the lady’s history which should be forgotten out of respect to her husband’s family. They have been misrepresented, especially by a fellow who is nothing better than a drunken liar—saving your lordship’s presence. Mrs. Weyland fears that you believe the story of this fellow, and that you may be protecting him, not only at the risk of her own reputation, but also at the risk of the honour—the unblemished honour—of her late husband’s family.’

Later on, considering these words, Oliver was surprised to remember that they had been swallowed without demur. But, indeed, with most persons a little punch makes the thickest flattery acceptable.

‘There is certainly a very extraordinary story.’

‘Told by one Fulton. He is kept at your lordship’s

expense at a certain tavern in Jermyn Street, where he employs his whole time in drinking. I will not trouble your lordship to talk about him. He has made up a tale with which he deceives all those who listen to him. It is a false tale from beginning to end. An alleged marriage. Yes, my lord, I knew you would be surprised. Quite false. I would submit to your lordship that the maintenance of such a creature is utterly derogatory to the dignity of your family.'

'Sir, I have trusted that man's story. Is it possible that I have been deceived?'

'Quite possible. Certain, indeed.'

'I have been at great expense over that man.'

'You have been deceived by him and misled by your own most noble desire that no dishonour should rest upon your name, and your most generous wish to protect the unfortunate. I weep to think of the wicked deception practised on so noble a heart.'

'Deception! Falsehood! The man shall answer for it.'

'My lord, leave him to me. As the adviser of the lady—I have the honour of her confidence—I acknowledge not only the expenditure, but also the motive—the most honourable motive—which called for that expenditure. It is the motive that affects your lordship more than the expenditure. Now, as we are, so to speak, in a private place, perhaps I might, with the utmost submission and respect, suggest that the support and countenance which your lordship has given to this man should be at once, and wholly, withdrawn, on the ground that his story is an impudent fable, and that the man is an impudent scoundrel, unworthy of credence. At the same time I should advise the lady in question to repay to your lordship at once, and without any further explanation, the expenses which have

been incurred on behalf of the man. Let me give your lordship another glass. So—a small slice of the lemon? The least little touch of the nutmeg? A little more sugar? One can always improve a glass of punch. Is it now entirely to your lordship's liking?

‘Quite. To return to the question of money paid.’

‘We cannot expect a bill, as if your lordship was nothing but an attorney. It would be proper, in such a case, for madam to offer a round sum and have done with it. Should we say a hundred guineas, and so an end, the man to receive no more help?’

‘A hundred and fifty, I believe, would more nearly cover the amount.’

‘A hundred and fifty. Why should we bargain and haggle? We are not bourgeois and tradesmen. A hundred and fifty. The whole amount shall be sent to your lordship's lodgings to-morrow. No mention of the subject, I would submit, should be made by anyone concerned, at any future time.’

‘No mention. To that I am quite ready to agree. Sir, as regards this person, I care nothing at all for him. I may have been deceived. Probably I have been deceived. If your information is correct, I have certainly been deceived. In my rank we frequently are deceived by the lower and the baser sort. They are born to plague and to deceive gentlemen. Well, sir, let this fellow go to the devil his own way. He is, as you say, a drunken beast.’

‘A drunken beast indeed! Truly, truly, and quite unworthy the notice of a man of your rank.’

‘He was brought to me by a person formerly my valet—now the keeper of a tavern. I depended upon that person's word. But who can trust a valet? They live and grow rich by lying and cheating. Well, sir, I have

been, as I said before, deceived. I dare say it will not be for the last time. Two hundred, I think we said.'

'A hundred and fifty, my lord. This sum is intended to cover all expenses'—the amount was indeed ample, seeing that Lord Stratherrick had been at no expenses whatever—'and will insure the dismissal of the fabricator of lies, and, I need hardly say, silence for the future as to the whole business, beginning, middle and end.'

'I cannot bargain, sir. I shall receive the amount you offer without the trouble of adding up sums of money. Addition in arithmetic is the science proper to trade, not to rank. I shall observe the conditions you propose. They are such as I should myself have proposed. The history of the lady may or may not be such as to cause scandals; these scandals, if they ever had any real existence, will for me exist no longer.' His lordship rose with much dignity. 'I thank you, sir. No more punch. Well—one glass. Your name, sir, I believe——'

He looked straight through him at the wall beyond in his coldest manner.

'Never mind my name, my lord. It is useless to repeat what you will forget again until we meet once more in the cockpit, for the fighting of a bye. I am, however, honoured by this conversation; and to-morrow I shall wait upon you with that bag of which we spoke. I have the honour, my lord——' He opened the door and bowed low as this noble lord departed.

In this way Oliver cleared the ground of one more danger. There would be no fear now of suggestions, hints, even discoveries, made by this nobleman concerning his sister-in-law. Oliver went home to his chambers with a cheerful heart. There was little more to be done. The lady's reputation was almost saved.

CHAPTER XXII

FLATTERY AND PERSUASION

IT has not escaped the reader's notice how this business, designed originally by the dressmaker in her own interests, as a secret, hole-and-corner affair, not to be known by anyone save herself and the lady concerned, and honourably kept concealed by her, had become gradually, and little by little, known to many—was ready, so to speak, to be divulged and noised abroad, and might at any moment become a secret that was common property, and talked about over the whole town. There is, indeed, if you think of it, no secrecy possible when more than one person knows of a thing; for one or the other will infallibly talk about it unless, which sometimes happens, it is for the private advantage of all who know it that it should continue to be a secret; indeed, the best way of letting any event become known everywhere is, as has often been proved, to communicate it as a profound secret. A whispers a story to B: 'But no one must know it.' B to C and D: 'But no one must know it.' C and D to E, F, G, H: 'But no one must know it.' And so it goes about—'But no one must know it.'

The lady in this case was to secure herself against arrest or molestation by transferring her debts to another person. There is but one way of effecting this exchange, some-

times so desirable—namely, by marriage. First, the excellent dressmaker, the lady's adviser, was to find a prisoner on the Poor side of the King's Bench Prison who would consent, for a consideration, to the marriage. Oliver was the prisoner chosen for the part, as being unusually penniless and friendless. Contrary to reasonable expectation, the lady refused him. Her refusal and her generosity were the foundation of Oliver's subsequent fortunes. He, therefore, for one, was not disposed to forget either the one or the other. Then followed the business in Newgate. There were concerned in this, which was to be a matter of such profound secrecy that no one, except the lady and the dressmaker, was to know anything about it, the happy bridegroom—the worthy native of the Gold Coast, Adolphus Truxo. As he was going to be hanged without delay, he mattered nothing. Next, however, there were the parson and his clerk; the turnkey; the creditor who had to be told what had happened; and anyone whom he might choose to tell—a good many people, it would seem, for the keeping of a single secret, one which involved the reputation of a lady of Quality.

Well, one of these, who ought to have been hanged, had not been hanged: he had been sent to the plantations for life. He had now returned, without leave, it is true, and with liabilities of a serious character. The parson had his registers to tell the truth if it were inquired after. The clerk and the turnkey might, perhaps, be neglected; they would not care to remember the name of the bride, nor would they even remember the circumstance—one of many of a similar character. There remained Mrs. Brymer herself. She had undertaken the communication of the fact itself to the draper of Ludgate Hill. He

had naturally received the intelligence with wrath unspeakable and an earnest desire for revenge—a desire nourished and strengthened by misery and poverty. After three years of poverty, with continual begging, snubs, refusals, and indignities, the man had become the tool of two designing persons who were using him for their own purposes. If he chose—whenever he chose—it was in his power to spread the news abroad by means of the most scandal-loving community in the whole town, that of the servants' hall. That he had not done so was due to no reticence or forbearance on his part, but to the facts that every day he became speechless after an early hour in the morning, and that, so far, he had been paid for silence by unlimited drink.

As yet there was no whisper of scandal against Isabel. In a town full of whispers, nods, murmurs, suggestions, smiles, and hints, her name had remained spotless. It was Oliver's task that it should be kept spotless, and this work engaged all his powers, his courage, his determination, and his diplomacy.

Fortune, aided by his own persistence and resource, had helped him. He had found out that, whatever scandal might be caused by the talk of the man Fulton, there was no foundation for any real fear of molestation on the part of the negro, who seemed at first the greatest danger. This man, chiefly concerned in the marriage, was not only a fugitive from justice, liable to be executed without trial, but he had also been married already at the time of the ceremony in Newgate. It was, therefore, no true marriage, and could not be advanced as a claim for property. Moreover, if that were anything, the man might be prosecuted for bigamy. To be sure, such a prosecution would not stay the voice of scandal, but it would prevent the danger

of further action on the part of the pretended husband. The man could do nothing except, if he were once more an occupant of the condemned cell, relate for the mongers of Last Dying Words the interesting story of his bigamy within the walls. But it is notorious that the Last Dying Words, the Confession, and the Ballads of the criminal which are so freely hawked about on the Tyburn road are composed without the least regard to the truth, and usually without any assistance from the convict.

At the same time the principal danger of the situation was due to the escape from Virginia of the creature Truxo. Once in prison, he might very well, by the help of the turnkeys, make his situation and his history known to the ingenious gentlemen who are always casting about for notes and anecdotes of a scandalous kind for the newspapers.

Oliver therefore addressed himself chiefly to this danger. You have heard that he had devised a plan for the escape of the negro, but you have not heard what it was. Now, his plan was simple but efficacious. It was nothing else than to get him out of the country. He would place him on board a ship bound for the West Coast of Africa, his own country. He argued with himself that, by raising his apprehensions of arrest, by keeping always before him the dangers of his position, even though no one was looking after the man, he would not only induce him to go abroad, but also to stay abroad. Meantime, although there was as yet no hue-and-cry after him, the news of his escape and of the murdered overseers would certainly arrive before long, when there would be the usual reward and the usual search, with the usual result.

Oliver therefore repaired to the port and made inquiries. One of the watermen took him to a ship in the Pool which

was fitting out for a voyage to the Gold Coast, and was now almost ready. He went on board, found the captain, and opened up the matter with him, not thinking it necessary to inform that officer of the whole truth as regards the position of the black. After a little negotiation, the captain agreed to take a negro passenger with a white wife, on the condition that he confined himself entirely to the fo'c'sle or the bows, out of sight and among the sailors. The captain further agreed to supply his passenger with sailor's rations and rum for a price to be arranged. He promised to land the man on the Gold Coast without asking any questions as to his history, or his reasons for leaving England. Finally, he swore that he would not sell the man as a slave—a thing which the captains of such ships are strongly tempted to do, seeing that a fine, grown negro, still in the prime of manhood, and in good health, is worth more than £50 even before he is shipped for Jamaica or the plantations, and with all the risks of the voyage—fever, dysentery, sea-sickness, home-sickness, madness, suicide or wreck.

There are not wanting, indeed, divines who preach and teach that the negro is descended from an inferior creature, having had, they think, another Adam and Eve, of black skin and woolly head, for his original ancestors; and having been expelled from another Garden of Eden, in which the forbidden fruit is supposed by these learned persons to have been the water-melon—a fruit to which the negro has ever been passionately addicted. The black man's Paradise they establish somewhere near the West Coast of Africa, where there are great rivers corresponding to the rivers mentioned in the Book of Genesis. They go on to argue that, being cursed with the burden of labours, but not for themselves or on their own account—an allevia-

tion granted to the white man—but for others, the blacks are condemned to perpetual slavery, owing to original sin, the nature of which has not been recorded, except that it was connected with the water-melon above mentioned. For these reasons the captains of vessels trading to the Guinea Coast are not to be blamed if they do engage in the traffic of black labour, which appears to some persons to be so cruel and so shameful.

However, this man seeming indifferent honest, Oliver concluded the bargain with him, paid him the money agreed upon, and engaged to put on board the black man and his white wife on the following evening. This done, he went back to his friend the actor of Drury Lane, and resumed his disguise, becoming once more an Irish craftsman escaping from Dublin in order to avoid arrest and trial and the probable consequences, and, thus attired, repaired to the White Dog of Great Hermitage Street, Wapping.

Mr. Truxo was lying snug, as he had promised to do. That is to say, he was sitting alone in his bedroom, having for company a simple jug of beer and his own thoughts, which were gloomy. He had not ventured below in the evening, but took his rum in his bedroom with no other company than that of Doll, whose conversational powers he despised. He was by this time in a condition of terror and suspicion which made him easy to handle. He mistrusted the company which used the tavern; he was afraid to sit among them. They were mostly, he knew, men of honour, being sailors, who would scorn to join the loathed tribe of informers for the sake of any reward, however great; but there were also craftsmen among them.

Now, craftsmen may be honest, especially those who are connected with the trade of boat-building and the fitting

of ships, but they are not all governed by the same nice principles. He was greatly disquieted, moreover, by the rumour of a hue-and-cry brought to him by this Irishman, whom he trusted, and upon whom he leaned.

Now, the reward for arresting an escaped convict—a runaway from the plantations, of whom there are many every year—is £20. The thief-taker, it is well known, keeps his man until he has qualified for the nobler reward offered for a highwayman, which is no less than £60, with a Tyburn ticket, the horse and arms of the criminal, and a share of the booty. It will be seen in the event that Mr. Truxo's apprehensions were well founded, though the name of the informer, for reasons that I am not able to give, was never divulged.

‘Sir,’ said Oliver—he pronounced the word in Irish fashion, ‘Sorr’: let us again pass over these tricks of speech, adopted to allay possible suspicion; besides, they are beneath the dignity of history—‘I have now done exactly as you desired. I think you will be pleased with my handiwork. I cut him down to the lowest, truly.’ It will be seen that, for readiness of invention, when it suited his purpose, this lawyer had few equals and no superiors. ‘I have done it,’ he repeated. ‘The job is now complete. To-morrow you will be in safety.’

‘What have you done, then? What did I order? Hang me if I remember ordering anything!’

‘Why, I have done what you told me to do yesterday.’

He communicated this information in a whisper, as if it was a thing of the highest importance.

‘Hark ye, brother! what fooling is this? Do you want your skull cracked? What did I tell you to do?’

Oliver sat down beside him with a cheerful show of

confidence, though one might almost as well have sat down on the grass beside a suspicious bull.

‘You might have been thought drunk, though it was early, but I know better. You’ve only forgotten a little. Nothing makes you drunk. Lord! A noble figure of a man you are, sure, with a thirst upon you like the mouth of a lime-kiln’—he pronounced it ‘killun’—‘a thirst that nothing satisfies. The drink isn’t invented that would make you drunk. If it had been an ordinary man, now! But it was you, and you can’t get drunk, not if you was to try your best.’

‘That’s neither here nor there,’ said Truxo, evidently mollified. ‘Perhaps I have forgotten. Sitting by myself in this cursed room is enough to make anyone forget. It reminds me . . . yes . . . it reminds me of the cell and Newgate. What did I tell you to do? There’s a many things to think about. What was it I told you to do?’

‘You said to me, speakin’ free but confidential—you said: “There’s no safety for me here; any one of the company might go out and lay an information. There’s twenty pound reward,” says you. “I must sheer off,” says you—quite right you are—“out of danger,” says you. But there—oh, Lord! of course you remember.’

‘Suppose I don’t remember; go on as if I didn’t remember; make believe I have forgotten. Let me see if you can remember.’ This he said thinking himself mighty cunning, because for his own part he remembered just nothing at all of any such conversation, having, indeed, made himself as drunk as David’s sow sitting all alone the whole day long.

‘Sir, I shall try to remember. Let me think. I want to remember just what you said, and no more. Well! You said, first of all, what I said just now. Then you went on

speaking low, "I can get what money I want—I want—all the money I want." Do you remember now? "Ay, ay! Go on, my lad," says you—"what money I want! I shall take ship as a passenger, not as a landsman, aboard a ship bound for the Gold Coast—my own country. There's plenty ships," says you, "bound for the Gold Coast or the Guinea Coast in the West Coast of Africay."

'I said that, did I? You remember that? Your memory's good, my lad. Take a pull of the beer to refresh it. Well, so far it's true. You've a good memory. Go on, my lad.'

'Them was your very words. Come, now, Mr. Truxo, don't say you've forgotten when I've been all the morning at work for you.'

'I didn't say so, did I? Go on, then.'

'Well, next you said—says you, "Go to-morrow morning down to the Pool," says you. "Where is the Pool?" says I. "You're a fool," says you. "Where is it?" says I again. "Go and make inquiries," says you. "Find a ship fitting out for the Gold Coast," you says, "which is my native country, and where I am a Prince when I'm at home." A Prince, you said.'

'I did say so—I remember now. It's quite true. A Prince I am, and a King I shall be if so be I choose, when I get back to my own people. A King, mind you, with a golden umbrella.'

'There! What did I tell ye? "Go," says you—"go and make them inquiries." And mighty fine you'll look with your gold umbrella.'

'I remember, Mr.—er—what's your name. I remember it all. You're quite right. That's what I said and what I meant. It's safer for me to go back to my own country

than to be lying snug and quiet here. As for lying snug, I'm sick of lying snug, and that's the truth.'

'If you was not so big and strong that all the world must needs look after you and ask who you are, it would be safe to stay in this town, which ought to be big enough for you and the constables and the informers all together. But there it is—you can't be forgotten. There must be hundreds who remember you; they will meet you in the tavern and in the street. How can you feel safe from them? "Why!" they cry, "there's Adolphus! He's come back! The great Adolphus! the brave Adolphus! the gallant Adolphus, that all the women fell in love with and the men envied! We never looked to see him again. We thought he was hanged; we heard he was gone to the plantations. Behold him! As great as ever, and back again—back again!" That's the way they'll talk; so it gets about; and the informers hear of it; and the next thing you know is the arrival of a posse with a head-constable, and off you go to Newgate again; and then there is an end, because you won't get another respite.'

The reader will not fail to observe the artful way in which Oliver made use of the man's vanity, which was enormous, almost as great as the vanity of Lord Stratherrick; and of his fears, which were at this juncture equal to his vanity. Mr. Truxo set down the tankard and responded with a murmurous and musical 'Ah!'—prolonged and appreciative. He *was* great; he felt it; as a housebreaker he was second to none; no bolt or bar would keep him out of a house, if he intended to get in; he was, he knew, a fine figure of a man; his colour caused no diminution of his self-conceit; the more a black is despised for his colour, the more vain he becomes. Perhaps in a country where all alike are black he is less open to this

temptation. Mr. Truxo was of opinion that his black skin caused all the world to admire him ; he was proud of the distinction of a velvety skin and a woolly pate ; he was proud of his brute strength ; he was a brave creature, who relied on his strength, and was always ready to fight, and feared no man ; and yet at the same time he was in mortal terror of a recapture and another stay—sojourn—which he knew would this time be very short, in that fetid court of Newgate. He listened, therefore, swallowing all the flattery and swelling with pride, even while his heart sank within him for terror.

‘Greatness,’ he said, presently finding words, ‘is very well, in its way ; but I want to escape the constable and his posse.’

‘Well, you have yourself invented a way. Who but you would have thought of such a simple way ? “I shall go back,” says you, “to my native country.” There’s a mind ! There’s brains ! There’s invention for you !’

‘My enemies never called me a fool.’

‘How could they ? Why, man, they’re too much afraid of you. A fool ? Ho ! ho ! Adolphus Truxo a fool !’

‘Look ye, Mr.—what’s your name ? I’m sick of it. I want to be outside again. You’ve had my orders.’ By this time he believed fully that he had actually given those orders. ‘Now let me know how you carried out them orders of mine ?’

‘Mr. Truxo, I will. First I carried them out faithful. Everything is settled. I’ve seen the captain on board his own ship. He’ll give you a berth and rations, with rum, same as the sailors have. He will sail in a day or two. Everything is settled, even to paying the money.’

‘Paying the money ? Where did you get the money ?’

Oliver hesitated. He had not thought of this point.

First it occurred to him to declare that Mr. Truxo himself had given him the money. He would have done so, as the safest course, but for the accident that he did not know how much money the negro had left. He therefore, with many qualms for associating even the thought of Isabel with this ruffian of the basest kind, answered diplomatically :

‘Why, Mr. Truxo,’ he said, in accents reproachful—‘why try to keep the secret from you? I was told to consider it a secret not to be told to anybody. As if there is anybody else who would give you the money!’

‘Do you mean that she—she—gave it?’

‘Who else would give it?’ The man would be gone in a day or two; let him go with a sense of obligation, if possible. Isabel would not know. ‘Who else, I ask you, Mr. Truxo, would give it?’

‘Oh! she gave it, did she?’

‘Hush! Hush! Doll is downstairs. She’s jealous.’

‘She gave it, did she? Then, I’ll get up and go and thank her myself.’

Oliver shook his head mysteriously.

‘Don’t you try to see her. Don’t think of it. There’s no more dangerous place for you in all London. She says that her house is watched; she says that you are to get on board and to sail away as fast as you can out of danger. Lord! How they would like to capture Adolphus Truxo once more! Be careful, she says—oh, be careful!’

‘Doll is jealous. That’s a fact. Well, if I was free, I’d soon show you how to get rid of a jealous wife. But I’m not free—more’s the pity!’

‘As you say, more’s the pity. Now, you’re to go on board to-morrow evening after dark. That’s all settled.

Don't ask any more questions. Doll is to go with you.'

'Doll to go with me? I don't want Doll. What am I to do with Doll in Africa?'

'She's your wife, man. You can't leave her behind.'

Adolphus laughed.

'She my wife? So is a dozen more of 'em, here and there. As for leaving her behind, I did it before and I'd do it again. I was glad to leave her behind. Of course, when I came back I wanted someone to fetch and carry for me.'

'Doll must go with you. It is not safe to leave her behind. She's jealous, and she might give trouble. Man, the law can reach as far as the Gold Coast, and a jealous wife can send out orders for your arrest out there as well as at home.'

Mr. Truxo replied, with a prolonged grunt of discontent:

'If she must come, I suppose she must. Well, there's plenty of fever on that coast. There's comfort in the thought. Oh yes! Doll can come with me, if you think it safer. I'm tired of Doll: she's ugly, and she's dirty. Look at her face, and look at her hair. Give me a creature like. . . . But Doll can come. Oh yes! Doll can come—cluck! cluck!' He chuckled. 'She said the other day that she would be glad to die for me. Very well—cluck!—she shall die for me if she likes. Better that, than live with me.'

Oliver was not squeamish by this time, but the sight of this brute joyfully anticipating the death of his own wife by fever was almost too much for him. However, he restrained himself.

'Doll would not be happy without you. Well, when

can you go aboard? The captain expects to sail in two days. You can go aboard when you please. The sooner the better, because the captain will not wait. As soon as the people have stowed away the cargo and his papers are ready he will drop down the river.'

'I will go to-morrow. The sooner I get out of this place, where I am nothing more than a prisoner, the better. I will go on board to-morrow evening at night-fall.'

'Very good. I will come to see you off. Ah, happy man! If I were only going, too!'

'Come with me, then. Why not?'

'I am afraid of the fever. Out there, they tell me, the white men all die. Besides, no one knows me here. I shall get a job somewhere along the river. The drink is good here and the company is good. I shall stay here, since I can't go back to Dublin again. Here no one knows why I left Ireland, and I am safe.'

So, this matter arranged to his satisfaction, though at the price of many inventions—let us hope they were forgiven, considering the good intentions of the inventor—Oliver returned to Drury Lane, and once more laid aside his disguise.

CHAPTER XXIII

HE WOULD HAVE REVENGE

EARLY in the morning, before the clock of St. James's had struck seven, Oliver walked down Jermyn Street. He was followed by a man at whose sight many of those who saw him trembled ; some of them turned into the newly-opened shops, where the 'prentices were dusting the counters and watering the floor ; some of them hurriedly found business which took them into the side streets ; some of them fairly took to their heels and ran away.

In the neighbourhood of St. James's, where the rakes, spendthrifts, prodigals, and gamesters of family mostly have their lodgings, the man's face was curiously familiar. It was much more familiar at that end of town than it would be in the City, where to know his face is to prove yourself a bankrupt, a lame duck, or one who has lost the credit which is the sustaining breath of trade. Those who saw that face remembered certain terrifying taps on the shoulder, more terrible than the rattling of the enemy's guns or the aspect of the cannon's mouth. They recalled a certain slip of paper, at sight of which the blood runs cold and the pulse ceases to beat ; they also recalled the exhibition of the King's crown worked in brass surmounting the short rod of office, at sight of which a giant would follow a child. These things were suggested by the hard

and sour visage of the functionary who followed close at Oliver's heels, and suggested to those who observed it the suspicion that this lawyer had himself been tapped on the shoulder, had seen this slip of paper, had been indulged with a sight of the crown, and would shortly be on his way to a sponging house—dreadful porch of the debtors' prison. In a word, Oliver's companion was the sheriff's officer—the catchpole.

'My friend,' said Oliver, when they arrived at the Grapes Tavern, 'you will please to remain outside; walk up and down. If I take advantage of your presence and the writ, I will bring out your man, whom you will then immediately arrest and carry off. If, on the other hand, it should turn out that I do not want you, I will come out alone.'

The man nodded, and proceeded to obey instructions. He stationed himself at the door of the tavern, and walked backwards and forwards, never more than a few feet from the portals, in case of an attempt to escape. The few customers—gentlemen of the worsted epaulette—who came to the house, as usual, for their morning draught, turned away in disgust at sight of this Cerberus, for the catchpole respects not any person, not even a footman, below the rank of a noble lord. They went away hurriedly, every man searching his conscience for the condition of his debts, and whispering to each other that perhaps it was Mr. Pinder himself, the landlord, who was wanted. No one knows what accidents may happen even to men reputed substantial, like mine host of the Grapes. Perhaps, however, it was one of their own company. They looked at each other. Who could it be? Or perhaps the sheriff's officer was waiting for the observer himself. Who can tell what old things might be revived, what new things

might be revealed, what plots might be invented? The Debtors' Prison and the Compter, if all accounts are true, cover many conspiracies, hold in captivity many innocent persons, are the homes of many private grudges and revenges. So that the early customer turned and fled in haste, going elsewhere for his morning draught, and only returning in fear and caution when the evening shades prevailed.

Meantime, Oliver proceeded with his business, which was one of prevention rather than punishment. He was about to remove the man Fulton from a place where he might do mischief, and where he might be persuaded to cause scandal. True, he was drunk nearly the whole day—so drunk that he was incapable either of articulate speech or of collecting and marshalling his thoughts with the intention of speech, if he had any thoughts left; but a sot—even the most confirmed sot—may sometimes light upon lucid moments, just as, on a day which appears completely wrapped in gloom and overhung with black clouds or obscured by yellow fogs, the sun may sometimes emerge for a few moments upon a surprised world. The danger lay in the chance of those lucid moments, which occur, as everyone knows in these days when hard drinking is so common, even when the man seems to have become a mere cask of mixed liquors, and his brain, to outward seeming, has long been overshadowed by the vapours of the punch and port, rum and strong ale, small beer and early purl, with which his interior has been inundated.

Oliver found his man already dressed and sitting in the parlour: the drunken sleep of the afternoon forbids a long sleep at night. Such a man awakes early—awakes, sits up, feels athirst, dresses in haste, and gets a drink to

begin the day as soon as he gets downstairs. No one else was in the room; the windows were shut, and the place still reeked with the fumes of tobacco, punch, beer, and all the drinks of the evening, with the tobacco and the breath of a crowded company. The man sat crouched in an elbow chair, a prey to the dejection—call it rather the despair—which always possessed him in the morning. He had called for his tankard of ale, but it had not yet been brought to him. His bloodshot eyes glanced uneasily about the room, as if he expected to see things. He had already, in fact, on several occasions, seen rats where he knew that no rats could be. He had even—which is a worse symptom than an imaginary troop of rats—been visited by devils—half a dozen devils—and he was naturally more afraid of the devils than of the rats. He sat therefore in terror. The devils might come in at any moment. Perhaps he expected to see them even in the parlour of the tavern, and this is not a customary place for the devils of a drunkard's vision.

Without, the morning was fresh and clear; the sunshine was bright; the air was cool. Strange that men should prefer the stinking parlour of a tavern to the fresh air of the morning!

Oliver wheeled round a chair, and sat down before the man.

‘Sir,’ he said, after contemplating this poor wreck for a while in silence, ‘I would have a little discourse with you. I have come here with that intention.’

Mr. Fulton raised a languid head and looked at him with scanty curiosity. His visitor was neither devil nor rat, but wore the wig and the gown of a lawyer.

‘Sir,’ he said, ‘I perceive that you are a lawyer. I love not lawyers. I have had enough of lawyers. You can go away, sir. I have no money for you. What do you

want with me? Why do you interrupt my . . . my . . . Charles! Charles!’ he cried pettishly, ‘my ale! Where is my ale? Bring me my morning ale. As for you, sir, I have nothing to say to you. Lawyers have taken my all. They have had thousands—thousands. There is nothing left for you, I assure you, sir—nothing, nothing left. Charles! Charles! Oh, here you are! Thank you, Charles. You have brought me—ah!—back to life—back to life.’

‘I am not come with any hostile intent, Mr. Fulton,’ said Oliver. ‘I am sorry that the lawyers left you nothing. You were once a bankrupt, I believe.’

‘I was—I was, sir; mine was a bankruptcy worth remembering. I’m not afraid of you, because I’ve got nothing left. And as to my debts, the creditors, when the lawyers had taken all my money—thousands upon thousands—were good enough to leave me my liberty. Sir, I acknowledge their generosity. They left me my liberty.’

‘So I have heard. So I understand, since you are here and not in one of His Majesty’s prisons.’

‘The lawyers took all my worldly goods, sir.’ He kept on repeating these allegations, which he had made so often that he now believed them. ‘The stock of my shop was worth many thousands; the goodwill of my business was worth many more thousands—worth as much again; my furniture and my silver plate’—he had half a dozen spoons in addition to the family pewter—‘were worth many hundreds—ah! many hundreds. My valuable books’—his library consisted of Foxe’s ‘Book of Martyrs,’ a ready reckoner, and ‘Drelincourt on Death’—‘were worth I know not what; my valuable furniture—heirlooms, sir; beautiful furniture, beautiful—was worth by itself hundreds. The lawyers took all—all. Their rapacity was beyond belief.

Let me tell you, sir, that no bankruptcy in the City ever excited more interest than mine. For weeks there was nothing else talked about on 'Change. A noble failure! Then, it was acknowledged, a great man fell—one who would have become Lord Mayor. Charles, another tankard—bring me another tankard.'

It will be observed that the man was at this hour of the day in the possession of his speech, but that he was no longer able to discern truth from falsehood.

'Sir,' said Oliver, 'I know the history of your failure. It will be well, let me tell you, for you to reserve these imaginary stories about thousands for the tavern company, and for those who will believe you. The amount for which you failed was under £500—I have taken the trouble to ascertain the truth by inquiry; your stock was practically worthless; you were in quite a small way; you had no silver plate to speak of, but took your meals off pewter, like others of your own station; your valuable library consisted of nothing more than one finds in such homes as yours. I dare say there were Foxe's "Book of Martyrs," Moll's Geography; a ready reckoner; a Book of Common Prayer, and, perhaps, Baker's History. As for your pictures and furniture, why, the less said the better. Indeed, Mr. Fulton, your grand bankruptcy was memorable for nothing else than the fact that few citizens in business supposed to be substantial have ever failed for so trifling a sum, and on 'Change the merchants never so much as heard of it.'

The second tankard was brought. Mr. Fulton took a long pull and sat upright with a sigh of relief.

'I suppose you know better than myself,' he said. 'As a lawyer, you are ready to swear anything. So my failure was a trifle. Here, Charles, help me upstairs out of this

man's presence. He seems to have come here to set me right on my own private affairs.'

'Presently—presently. Charles is not wanted, Mr. Fulton. You must listen to me with a little patience. Don't drink any more just yet.' Oliver took the tankard out of his hands. The man looked on helpless. Then he burst into tears, and cried, like a child, 'My ale!—give me my ale.' Oliver took no notice, but went on with his discourse.

'After the first steps in bankruptcy, being forced thereto by your creditors, you bethought yourself, Mr. Fulton, of a certain lady who was indebted to you in the sum of something like £100, be the amount more or less.'

'She was. It was this woman—this accursed woman—who drove me into bankruptcy. It was not £100, but £1,200 that she owed me.'

'Ta—ta—ta, Mr. Fulton! I am a lawyer and I know the facts. Do not tell me lies, I entreat you. Choose some other person for your lies. The debt was less than £100. Moreover, it was not due for six months to come. You concealed that debt from your creditors; you removed the entry from your books. It was a fraudulent act, Mr. Fulton, a fraudulent act.' Oliver shook his forefinger in the other's face. 'You might have been prosecuted for fraud and forgery and embezzlement. That may yet be your fate. You resolved on getting this money for yourself by frightening and threatening the lady, and thereby defrauding your creditors.'

Mr. Fulton left off weeping. The influence of the beer asserted itself again. 'Sir,' he said, 'I don't know who you are, but let me tell you, sir, in plain language, that you lie. You are a liar, sir. All lawyers are liars. They are all liars, robbers, thieves, cut-throats, villains. They

strip the bankrupt, they rob the widow, and they defraud the orphan. That is all I have to say. Give me my tankard. Give me——’

Oliver placed the pewter out of his reach.

‘Mr. Fulton, if you give me the lie you will provoke me to take certain steps which will continue to cause you the greatest inconvenience. Do not be afraid’—for the man held up his hands before his face as if for protection. ‘I am not going to pull your nose, nor to offer you the slightest personal violence. My proceedings will be of a more legal character—and much more lasting in their effects.’

‘What do you come here for, then?’

‘I come to remonstrate with you; I come here for the protection of a lady—none other than the lady whom you drove by your pretences and your threats to attempt—to attempt, I say, not to take—certain decisive steps, otherwise not to be generally recommended, for her own safety.’

‘Why, she defrauded me!’ the man shrieked; ‘she defrauded me, I say! What do you mean by your cock-and-bull story about attempts? Why, she defrauded me! Do you call that an attempt? What do you know about it? She defrauded me.’

‘Let us consider the position of affairs then and now. For the present, you have been placed in this house in order to keep you quiet. I think that the step, however well meant, was a mistake. I would have given you a drink, on the other hand, in order that you might speak, so that I could prove to the world how great a villain and how worthless and pitiful a rogue you are. However, so far you have observed the silence for which you were paid. Your wages are your board and lodging, with as much drink as you please to call for.’

‘That may be so ; I shall not deny it. Call it what you please. I have been paid for silence. That shows how much the lady is afraid of me. Sir, I say again, she defrauded me. As for my defrauding my creditors, I would have you to know that I have always been an honest man—always an honest man, sir.’

‘So say the unfortunate persons who wear the irons in Newgate. You have been paid by persons acting without the knowledge of this lady. Let me assure you that she is not in the least afraid of you, or of your story about her thousands.’

The man laughed.

‘Not afraid of me ! a fine story, truly ! Well, sir, you may tell the lady that unless she continues to buy my silence at a much higher figure than she has yet paid, I will make the whole town ring with the story. Yes, the story of her marriage and her fraud !’

‘You make the town ring ? *You*, the companion of lackeys ! *You*, a poor, contemptible bankrupt ! A pitiful beggar and ragamuffin ! A wretched, drunken, besotted creature ! What do you mean by your threats ? Understand, sir, that we defy you—we defy you.’

Perhaps the diplomacy of the lawyer was more conspicuous in this burst of sham indignation than in his neat but more obvious play upon the vanity of Lord Stratherrick and Adolphus Truxo. It had its effect in awakening alarm in the mind of the other man.

‘Oh, you defy me !’ He was by this time restored partially—not quite—to his ordinary condition of a muddy brain. Yet he observed with uneasiness the resolute face of his visitor. ‘You defy me ? Why, sir, you don’t know the tale I shall tell.’ He tried, but without effect, to turn the tables. ‘It is a tale—a tale, I say—that will

—will destroy any lady's reputation—any lady's reputation.'

'Oh, I know it quite well; I know the story you propose to tell. I also know what we shall do when you have told it.'

'What will you do then?'

'We shall begin by turning you into the street; that will be only a beginning. You will have no more drink—remember that, not to speak of food and lodging: no more drink. Your wife will not admit you to her lodging; she has done with you. Your daughter will refuse to give you any assistance whatever; she has long been disgusted with you. The lady herself will most certainly refuse you any assistance. The former friends upon whom you have depended so long are sick of helping a man who cannot help himself. Consider, if you can think of anything, what it is you will most certainly bring upon yourself if you dare to spread abroad this story.'

'I shall have my revenge. I shall drag her—drag her—drag her'—he was a little uncertain what he was going to drag, and he hesitated—'drag her name down into the dust. She will never be able to recover, never.'

'You will do your worst if you please. Then our turn will come, and you will starve afterwards.'

'I shall have my revenge. And my friends—there's a noble lord—think of that!—a noble lord among them—they will not see me starve; they will let me keep on in this house, where the company is good, yes, and the drink is good, and plenty of it, and the landlord is friendly. I have never, not even in the days of my prosperity, enjoyed so much good drink and so many kinds of it. My great and powerful friends will look after me. I am not afraid

of you, sir, nor of any lawyers, nor of all the lawyers together.'

'I warn you—mind, Mr. Fulton, I warn you solemnly. The tale you propose to tell is not true. I believe that you have repeated it so often that you actually think that it is true. In fact, it is not true that this lady owed you £1,200; it is not true that her account, which was for less than £100, was overdue; it is not true that any action of hers put you into bankruptcy; it is not true, finally, as you think of telling people, that she married a convict under sentence of death.'

'What? Not true? Why, she married a negro—a negro, sir, a black beast of a negro, who was afterwards hanged.'

'She did nothing of the kind. She did not marry that man about whom you were told. The man was not hanged: he is, on the contrary, still alive. Well, sir, are you resolved upon taking your revenge? Will you attempt to spread abroad this invention—this monstrous collection of lies—among the lackeys and valets and coachmen who frequent the house?'

'Sir'—he attempted an attitude of dignity, but his shoulders lurched and his head reeled. 'Sir,' he said with increased thickness of speech, because the time of sleep and inarticulate speech was returning, 'it has been my boast and my pride—my pride and my boast—throughout my life to forgive nobody. I never forgive—never forgive. Revenge is dearer to me than life itself. I defy you—do your worst. I will have my revenge. I will let all the world know the truth. You sit there, and you pretend to know. What do you know? I say—— Gimme the tankard. Give it here. Ah!' For Oliver yielded, and restored the pot of ale. 'Ah!' He sat up, his intellects

quicken for the moment. 'Ah! she did owe me all that money. It was not a defrauding of the creditors. If the entry in the day-book was torn out, did I do it? Did I tear it out? She did get married in Newgate—she was married to a big black man. I saw him. He was hanged, and the debt was hanged with him. I know what I am saying—I know very well. You can't frighten me!'

Oliver considered this poor, impotent boaster with a kind of pity. The man was so contemptible and yet so dangerous and so obstinate. His design was to bring him, if possible, to a better mind, and to persuade him, rather than to threaten him, into abandoning these wild schemes of revenge. Any man, however degraded and drunken, may do mischief with a lighted torch or with a flint and steel. Oliver wanted to deprive the man of the temptation to use the lighted torch or the flint and steel.

He tried another line of persuasion. He pushed back his chair, he rose, and stood over the man.

'Sir,' he said, 'let me remind you that this lady has become the most generous benefactor of your family. She found your wife and daughter starving—nay, they were nearly starved. You were all going to be turned into the street, penniless. She found a decent lodging, such as befits a respectable woman like your wife. She furnished the rooms for her; she clothed her; she fed her; she has made her an allowance, which she will continue. As to your daughter Alice—— Sir, I have the honour of that young lady's acquaintance—say, her friendship. She is as good as she is beautiful. How long would her goodness have remained in this wicked town when she saw her mother starving? Sir, this lady has taken your daughter Alice'—his voice softened and his eyes became humid—'into her

own house. She has made Alice her friend, her companion. She has loaded her with gifts and overwhelmed her with compassion and with goodness. And this is the lady whom you propose to ruin by blasting her reputation! Think, Mr. Fulton! Think!

‘Think! I have thought. She owes them all this in return for the mischief she has done me. Sir, I will have my revenge.’

Oliver walked up and down the room, considering. How was he to touch this hardened heart?

‘Come,’ he said; ‘you talk at random. You propose to tell your friends the lackeys—whatever you please. I do assure you, Mr. Fulton, upon my honour, that your friends, as you call them, have given you up—that your maintenance in this house has been abandoned. You are about to be turned into the street. How will you tell the company of the Grapes this or any other story? You have no money to call for more drinks; there is not one among them all who will oblige you even with a pot of small beer. How will you tell them?’

‘I will have my revenge. I will have my revenge,’ he replied, with a poor show of doggedness.

‘On the other hand, I am empowered to make you an offer—an offer which you are far from deserving. Now, give me your best attention, Mr. Fulton. The offer is this: you are to go into the country, fifteen miles at least from town. If you consent to do this, and promise to circulate no more stories about bills and fraudulent doings and—and marriages in Newgate, you shall receive the sum of fifteen shillings a week. With fifteen shillings you can pay for a room and a bed. They will cost you, say, two shillings a week; your food will cost you, say, eight-pence a day; there remains for drink and for clothes

the sum of eight shillings a week at least. There, Mr. Fulton, is my offer.'

The man drank off the rest of the tankard. He was now incapable of understanding anything properly ; he saw things in a haze, not clearly. He had returned to his ordinary condition—he was half-drunk ; words and things had no real meaning for him.

'Don't waste your breath,' he said thickly. 'You are only talking nonsense. I will have my revenge. This is a comfortable house ; the company is good ; the drink is good and plentiful—I have never before had such a skinful of good drink.'

'Very good, Mr. Fulton—very good. I have done all I could, and I have failed. Please to step this way with me.'

Oliver took the man by the arm. He was quite unresisting, and rose, murmuring and repeating in broken language that he had always prided himself on having his revenge, and that revenge was dearer than life, with more bombastic stuff of a brain bemused.

Oliver led him to the door where the sheriff's officer stood like a sentinel. At a signal this man stepped forward, and tapped the revengeful bankrupt on the shoulder, at the same time producing a slip of parchment.

'In the name of the law,' he said, 'you are my prisoner.'

Some gleam of intelligence crossed the drunkard's brain. He turned pale ; he reeled.

'What?' he cried. 'Whose prisoner?'

'Mine,' Oliver replied. 'I am the detaining creditor. The debt is that for drink at the Grapes. I gave you every chance. You will now, in the debtors' prison, reflect at leisure on the consequences of desiring revenge.'



'IN THE NAME OF THE LAW, YOU ARE MY PRISONER.'

You may tell any stories you please—on the Poor side. You will have no drink and very little food. I have nothing more to say to you. He has no money for fees or garnish. No need to take him to the Compter. He will go, in the usual manner, to the Poor side at once.'

CHAPTER XXIV

TO MAKE THINGS SAFE

It was Oliver's design to deal with the man who loved revenge better than life so that he might enjoy four-and-twenty hours, at least, of the prison—namely, a day and a night—a period which would afford an understanding even to his muddled brain of the full delights of the Poor side—those delights with which he was himself familiar. The time of year was still summer, but late summer, when the nights begin to grow cold. The prisoner would therefore be able to anticipate some—not all, it is true—but some of the joys of winter on the Poor side, with no bed to lie upon; nothing to mitigate the hardness of the bare floors; nothing between the dirt and grime of those unwashed boards and his own limbs; not even a blanket to cover him for warmth; not even a change of clothes for comfort: a crowded room locked up at night upon the tenants, with close, confined air; no food, unless he was so lucky as to share in some of the miserable doles of the prison, which, indeed, newcomers seldom secure for themselves; and no drink except the water from the pump. Think of the misery, to such a man as Fulton, of such a day! Four-and-twenty hours, Oliver thought, of the Poor side, would be quite enough—and far more than enough—to quench that burning desire for revenge.

He would leave his man, therefore, alone for that space of time. There was, however, one more source of danger, hitherto unconsidered and unsuspected; that, namely, from the parson who had conducted the ceremony in Newgate. Like all his brethren, the parson kept a register in which he entered the names of the couples whom he married. Now, Oliver considered, if the man were to arrive at any knowledge or suspicion of the wealth to which the lady had attained, he would most probably endeavour to make money by his discovery. As he had not done so, it was probable that he had quite forgotten the name of the bride, and even the circumstance of the function itself. There are so many marriages of this kind that the parsons do not, in fact, ever remember them. Oliver resolved, however, to find out the man, and to ascertain the truth. Again, the danger arising from inscription in the register would not be great, because, without any qualifying description, and if it were not bolstered up and supported by other evidence, such an entry would hardly be considered evidence. In such cases a name may be easily assumed. A maid-servant, an apprentice, a milliner's girl, for instance, may assume for the occasion and be married under the name and style of her mistress. In itself, therefore, the register would be of no use to its possessor; and as for any other evidence, Oliver was disposing of that by the banishment of one of the two persons chiefly concerned and the imprisonment of the other.

However, it is not a long journey from the Temple to the Fleet Market, and he made his way to the place.

The haunt of the marrying parsons is not a delectable place for the stranger to visit. Nowhere is it mentioned as one of the shows of London; the Market, seldom

cleaned, is strewn and covered with broken fruit and vegetables, trodden into the ground and putrefying; it is encumbered with wheelbarrows and hand-carts; it is not only noisome with its unswept rubbish, but it is dreadful to ears polite by reason of the people, who are continually fighting, quarrelling, and cursing. Every other house is a tavern, and in most of the taverns may be found a parson in cassock, bands, and wig, ready to marry couples in a back-room, at a fee proportioned to the appearance of the pair—namely, from five shillings, or even half a crown, to a guinea.

On Fleet Bridge and Ludgate Hill are the men who tout all day long for their masters, dragging in, so to speak, any couples who may happen to be walking along the street or on the hill.

To one of these men Oliver addressed himself. He learned from him, first, that the clergyman who had tied that futile knot was dead; he had been dead for nearly three years—the calling, it would seem, is not conducive to long life; perhaps, because it is too intimately connected with punch and strong drink of various kind; but he was dead, whatever the cause. Next, Oliver was invited to bring along a lady to whom he might be comfortably and safely married by the defunct divine's successor; thirdly, as he showed no sign of providing a lady, he was earnestly invited to offer the means of procuring a drink for a thirsty throat. Lastly, he was referred to the landlord of the tavern where that pious soul—the deceased parson—had set up his quarters, lived, drank, eaten, slept, and died.

Oliver found the place a little way up the Market. The landlord was standing at his open door: a man of middle age and forbidding aspect, bearing upon his brow the un-

mistakable stamp which sooner or later brands the man who leads a life of continual iniquity. No one can deny, I believe, that the landlords of the Fleet taverns do lead lives of iniquity, if half the reports are true.

‘I have come,’ said Oliver, ‘to make inquiries concerning the register of marriage, as it was kept some three years ago by your marrying parson, who is now, I am told, dead.’

‘Oh,’ the man replied, ‘you would like to see those registers, would you? Pray, sir, why do you want to see them?’

‘I hear, I say, that the parson is dead. You have, I am quite sure, kept his books.’

‘Maybe—maybe. You are a lawyer, I believe, sir—by outward show, anyhow. When a lawyer wants to see one of our Fleet registers, it is for some purpose of his own, I take it; not, that is, out of mere curiosity.’

‘Naturally. You are quite right, sir: it is not mere curiosity.’

‘Well, sir—the register is, perhaps, in my possession. I do not say. Perhaps it is, perhaps it is not. May a body ask, again, therefore, why you want to see it?’

Oliver assumed his most lawyer-like air.

‘Sir,’ he said, ‘I need not inform you—it must be plain to a person of your understanding—that a register may be of infinite importance in proving, or substantiating, or the reverse, as the case may be, such things as claims to an estate, claims to inheritance, claims to succession. Take, for example, the case of one born in wedlock, who cannot prove his mother’s marriage except by reference to those registers. But I am ashamed of wasting your time with explanations of matters so simple.’

‘Ay, sir, I understand very well. Or there may be

equally the case of a woman who would hide, if she could, the proofs of her marriage. You take me, sir? Those marriages, most beneficial to the community, because they are cheap and easy, may be hastily entered upon. Again—you take me, sir?’

‘Perfectly—perfectly. You are quite right. Such a case might conceivably arise. Such a case is, in fact, possible and most likely to arise.’

‘Well, sir, we come to this: the registers are worth money, especially to lawyers. You must therefore pay for looking at them.’

‘By all means. I will give you a guinea for looking at the register kept by this divine—this devoted servant of Hymen. I want, especially, the register of three years ago.’

‘High men or low men were all the same to my old friend. But, alas! good sir—of three years ago? You say of three years ago? I can show you, now, the register of two years ago, or even five years ago; but of three years ago—dear! dear! it is most unfortunate! You must know, sir, that the cause of the death of my unfortunate and most pious friend—he was a member of the University of Oxford, sir, all of whose members, I believe, are most pious, and as full of learning as an egg is full of meat—I say that the cause of his death was that he happened, being unfortunately in liquor—which was, I admit, his weakness—to set his candle beside his bed and too near to the sheets, in consequence of which the latter caught fire, and, in extinguishing the flames, we not only soused and nearly drowned the unfortunate gentleman, who was lying dressed in his silk cassock, but caused him a fever, which, together with the burns about his arms and head, carried him off three days after, with bellowings enough to keep the whole Market awake all night.’

‘And the registers?’

‘They were at the time under his pillow, where, drunk or sober, he always kept them. And what with the fire and the water, they were mostly reduced to pulp and ashes—pulp and ashes, sir. Nothing more. Pity! pity! No one knows the loss—to me—caused by that disaster.’

‘So. They are no longer legible, then?’

‘Such as they were—brown ashes and pulp, as I said—we threw them away. There was not a single page left of them that could be read. If, sir, the marriage whose proof you desire belonged to that time, there is no proof of it left, except the marriage-lines given to the lady.’

‘Oh, they were destroyed. Perhaps it is as well. My friend, you have lost a guinea by this misfortune. Pray, if I may ask, have you found a successor to this worthy gentleman?’

‘Truly, sir, there is another divine—also a properly ordained clergyman of the Church of England by law established—who hath taken his place. A scholar, they tell me; but he lacks the persuasiveness of his predecessor; he certainly drinks as hard, but we find him wanting in the persuasion and the pleasantness which used to make my house a place of resort for gentlemen. His predecessor had a ready wit and a friendly smile, and always a comfortable word for the bride. I shall have to send this one about his business. When he is in his cups, he does not laugh or sing or make merry. If you’ll believe me, sir, he weeps—weeps over his sins. Weeps, sir—he weeps! How can young people be encouraged to marry by a man who sheds tears if you give him so much as a glass of punch?’

Oliver returned to his chambers and wrote a letter to Isabel. He wrote so that she should understand, but, in

case of the letter falling into strange hands, no one else.

‘DEAR MADAM (he said)

‘I have to report that our affairs are going on even better than at first I expected. I cannot but believe that Providence has interposed, in return for the unspeakable goodness of one who shall be nameless, to convert the dangers that seemed like so many horrid bristling rocks ahead into ghosts and phantoms, harmless, and vanishing at the first confronting. We were threatened by five men ; two of them—call them A and B—wanted to make a handle of power and profit for themselves ; they would never—such was their intention—leave us alone, but would continually, by threats of exposure, extort money out of us. The third—call him C—would accept payment from the first two in order to keep silence. If he once broke that rule of silence, his imaginary power was gone.

‘The fourth man—call him D—the most dangerous of all, did, I confess, present himself to me in the shape of a rock not to be avoided. I thought at one time that our barque would founder against the crags of this rock. The fifth man—whom we may call E—was one who kept a register in which certain names were entered. It was most desirable that this register should not be made public.

‘Now, consider what has happened. I have found out with the greatest ease that the fourth man—D—who appeared to have so strong a case that I have likened him to a rock—has no case at all, no power at all, and, so far from being a danger to us, is at our mercy. I have arranged that D is to leave this country. He goes on board ship to-night, and sails to-morrow. It is most unlikely that he will ever venture to return to this country

again. If he does, he will meet with the end that he richly deserves. Let us put him, once for all, out of our thoughts and out of our apprehension. The fifth man—E—is dead. His cup was running over; he had been permitted to work evil with greediness; his end was fitting. With him perished his register. There is not a page left of that register which can be read; it is altogether destroyed. There is an end of apprehension on that side.

‘Remain the two, A and B. They can do nothing without C. We might, therefore, have defied them. But hostilities are best avoided. I have arranged in a friendly spirit that you shall hear nothing more on this subject either from A or B.

‘The only person left is therefore C. It cannot be denied that C might do a great deal of mischief by spreading abroad false rumours which would be almost impossible to answer or to refute. To C, therefore, I have devoted a good deal of attention. The result of all is that he refused my offer of maintenance and allowance, declaring that he intended to have revenge, and that he persisted in his story, which he promised to proclaim abroad. Fortunately, a creditor has caused his arrest for debt. He is now in the King’s Bench Prison, on the Poor side. I have reason to believe that life on the Poor side of a debtors’ prison is the most wretched way of life known or invented. I am expecting, therefore, speedy and absolute submission in return for the means of procuring drink; and I am now on my way to see the creature, and to ask him how he likes his revenge and its consequences.

‘Your servant loyal and faithful,

‘O. M.’

This letter written and despatched, Oliver took oars

across the river and proceeded to the prison which he knew so well, and to the Poor side, which he remembered with no little humiliation. As he had expected, twenty-four hours of privation had already reduced his revengeful friend to a condition of great humility.

He had arrived at the prison, thirsty, miserable, and penniless, in the morning. He had spent the whole day and the whole night without food. He would also have spent it without drink, but that necessity knows no shame. At noon he parted with his wig—it was an old wig, one of the kind that is generally used by the shoeblack when quite worn out; the wig procured him a pint of wine; towards five o'clock or so he sold his coat and his waistcoat for two tankards of black beer and a glass of gin; in the evening he sold his shoes and his stockings for an equally trifling equivalent. And all night long he had been lying awake in suffering—such suffering as only the drunkard suffers when drink is withheld from him—with a yearning, a madness in the brain, a constriction of the throat, a deadly craving worse than the worst pangs of gout or rheumatism; a suffering not to be understood save by those who have felt it, if their accounts can be trusted who have tried to describe it.

‘Sir,’ he cried eagerly, at sight of his flinty-hearted creditor, ‘I have been looking for you—oh! all day yesterday, I have been looking for you. I thought you would come—sir, sir! Help me—oh! help me!’

‘Where are your clothes, man?’

Indeed, without his coat and wig, without shoes or stockings, with his swollen neck and pendulous cheeks, the poor wretch looked miserable indeed.

‘Sir, it a most extortionate place. They gave me, I do assure you, next to nothing for them. A mere den of

robbers. The wig—I got it at a shilling lottery—went for a pint of Lisbon; the coat gave me three glasses of punch; the stockings this morning procured me a pint of small ale—and I am already consumed with thirst again. Oh, sir! have pity on a poor thirsty, unfortunate bankrupt! My throat is like an oven for dryness. For the love of the Lord, sir, give me a drink—give me a drink.’

Oliver sent for a bottle of wine.

‘There!’ he said, ‘this will make you happy for an hour.’

The man sat with his head in his hands, moaning for the consuming fire of thirst in his throat. When the bottle came, he seized it and drank off half the contents without the power of pouring it into a glass.

‘Ha!’ he sighed, setting down the bottle with a deep sigh, ‘it is heaven. I want no better heaven.’

‘How do you like the prison?’

‘Sir, it is—it is——’ He drank again. ‘It is not heaven. All night long I was pursued, sir, by rats. The rats of this prison are as large as cats. All night they ran after me—thousands of rats, there were—and they chased me and no one else. Do you think, sir—I ask you as a Christian and a Briton—do you think that His Gracious Majesty’s prisoners should be hunted—hunted, sir—he looked about him with terror in his eyes—‘hunted by rats as big as cats and twice as fierce?’

‘Why, sir, if you invite them, so to speak——’

‘They ran after me all night—only after me. The other men in the room sat up and cursed me. I did not bring the rats into the prison. Oh! they had no pity upon me. They cursed me. Yet was it my fault that the rats came?’

The man’s livid looks betrayed the horror of his mind.

‘I see them again,’ he cried, ‘jumping about!’

Oliver gave him the bottle. He drank again.

‘Ha!’ he said, ‘they are gone! they are gone! Where did they go to? How did they get into the room? How did they get out of it?’

‘You told me,’ said Oliver, ‘that you would have revenge. You said that revenge was dearer than life. You now know what your revenge is likely to cost you. And as, so long as you are in the prison, you cannot have revenge, I suppose you would like to keep your life.’

‘Sir, I have been misled. I was wrong. I don’t want any revenge. Somehow, my figures were cast up wrong—I was never good at accounts. I would rather have drink than revenge. Give me drink and I will ask for no more revenge. Sir, I confess that I was wrong. The lady did not owe me £1,200, but less than £100. I thought to cheat the creditors—I did, indeed. What can I say more?’ Indeed, his submission was as complete as could be desired by anyone. ‘I have been deceiving you, sir—I have been deceiving you.’

‘Not me, sir. You have not been able to deceive me, I do assure you. What, then, Mr. Fulton, do you propose?’

‘Nothing—nothing. Oh! if those rats——’

He trembled and shook.

‘Now, sir, give me, once more, your attention. You are in great misery; you will be in greater misery before long. If, however, you are disposed to sign a statement setting down the truth of the whole matter, so far as you are concerned, I shall not take you out of this place, where, after all, you will speedily make yourself quite as comfortable as outside, but I will remove you to the Master’s side. I will give you—what I offered you before—fifteen shillings

a week. But I will not trust you outside the prison walls. Will that do for you ?

‘Sir, I accept—I accept with joy. Anything—anything! I want protection—oh!—against the rats! I want drink. They run away when they so much as smell beer or rum. I accept, sir, with gratitude and joy.’

If Oliver had been in the tavern an hour later he would have been edified by the spectacle of the prisoner restored to self-respect and even happiness. He was then in the first stage: that of boastful imagination.

‘Gentlemen,’ he said, ‘I hope we shall be very good company. For my own part, I am the great Mr. Fulton, of Ludgate Hill, whose bankruptcy made so great a stir in the City some years ago. I have been a long time getting here, but I am here at last, for a miserable little debt, after my failure for thousands. Sooner or later we all arrive here. I drink to the health of the company. It was for many thousands—a great many thousands—that I failed. There was a woman who . . .’ He checked himself and looked about the room. ‘No,’ he said, ‘never mind about the woman. I drink,’ he repeated, ‘to the company. This is a pleasant place: the air is wholesome, the courts are spacious, the rooms are convenient, the company is select and polite. I have always been accustomed to the politeness of a select club in a respectable tavern, and here the drink is good—the drink is good.’

I do not think that Oliver had occasion to pay that allowance very long. The graveyard of St. George’s opened, I am sure, before many weeks or months, for the final reception of the poor wretch who had made of life so terrible a mess and bungle. The tears shed by wife and child were, I believe, few and quickly dried. There is, indeed, one reading of the Fifth Commandment too much

neglected. When a man has fallen so low as to be hopeless ; when there can be no reform, but only a deeper sinking in the slough, with no chance of improvement, the children who would most anxiously obey that Commandment will do well to pray for the best thing that can happen : the speedy dissolution of their parent, with gratitude and thank-offering when their prayers are granted. And as for the honour they are bound to bestow upon a father, it must be with such reservation as that taught to Alice, namely, to honour her father for the gifts of Providence, and for the character which the Lord intended him to develop.

CHAPTER XXV

SHOWING HOW THE BEST-LAID PLAN MAY GO WRONG

‘WE have now,’ said Oliver, following up his letter by calling at the house in St. James’s Square, ‘settled the whole business, I believe. The two principals, if we may so call them, are quite safe. One of them is locked up and will remain locked up for life in a debtors’ prison. Oh! it is no hardship for him, but rather the reverse. He will have all he wants, and will not get into mischief. The other will to-morrow be dropping down the river, on his way to the Gold Coast, as I told you. There, let us hope, he will remain for the rest of his natural term, which will probably be short, as commonly happens with men of violence.’

‘Was there no other way with the wretched man Fulton than making him a prisoner?’

‘My dear madam, I did not propose to leave him on the Poor side. I have, believe me, a lively recollection of that side of the prison. The man blusters about revenge. I have placed him, therefore, where revenge is impossible. Revenge, he says, is dearer than life. Very good. I thought that we would try what starvation, with no drink, would do for our friend. It was revenge with starvation, or the means of life without revenge. I would give him a choice. He has now, as I was sure he would

do, submitted humbly. I have therefore, with your permission, given him the means of living—and drinking. “We do not drink to live,” he would say; “we live to drink.” So long as he can drink, he is as happy in the prison as out of it.’

‘Oliver! What will Alice say?’

Oliver changed colour.

‘You will help me, I am sure, madam, in persuading Alice that I have acted for the best.’

‘As for the other man?’ asked Isabel. ‘You said——’

‘As for the other man, I will go this evening in order to make quite sure of his readiness for departure. He is now reduced to terror unspeakable, and will, I think, give us no trouble.’

So Oliver assumed his disguise—it turned out to be for the last time—and repaired to Great Hermitage Street in order to take his sable friend on board ship, and to leave him there, in comparative safety, as he judged, until the sailing of the vessel. It was in the evening, about six, just before sunset, that he arrived at the tavern. And there, to his astonishment, though he might have expected the thing to happen, he encountered the very thing which he had so carefully held up before Mr. Truxo as a great and imminent danger, without believing in it himself. He had cried ‘Wolf’ continually, without thinking that the wolf might be there all the time.

How the thing was done, or by whom, he never discovered; since the treachery ended otherwise than was hoped, no one was the gainer by it. In any case, there was no profit in making further inquiry. As for the company which frequented the tavern, one of whom was most certainly the informer, they, as a rule, could be trusted to a man for a nice, even for a jealous, sense of honour. The

sailors and the lightermen and all the riverside folk would, one is sure, considering the general tenour of their own lives, scorn the work of an informer, and would refuse with indignation to take the wages, however large, offered as the price of infamy. But there were occasional craftsmen who also used the house, and among craftsmen may sometimes be found here and there one with an eye to the reward, rather than to honour; to personal gain, rather than the general welfare. It must have been one of these, not one of the sailors, who betrayed the heroic negro—hero of so many housebreakings, robberies, and even murders.

As to the discovery of the fact—namely, that Mr. Adolphus Truxo was a convict who had escaped from the House of Bondage and the plantations in Virginia—this had probably been confessed and whispered with pride, passed around an admiring circle, and revealed by none other than the hero of the adventure himself when in his cups. The rest is easy of surmise: given a man with a feeble sense of honour; given a man, also, who, while he drinks, declares the plain truth boastfully, even though it should lead to his own destruction—what more certain than an information laid at Bow Street? what more natural to expect than a bid for the large reward offered for such information?

In other words, the thing that had happened was this. The negro, a braggart and a fool, one who could confess the damning truth to such a stranger as the Irish refugee on the first evening of their acquaintance, had not been able to restrain his tongue with other strangers, so that of all those who sat drinking together in the tavern there was not one but presently knew that here was a man who had been sentenced to death as a housebreaker;

who had been respited ; who had been sent to Virginia as a convict for life ; who had broken free ; murdered, it was whispered, half a dozen overseers ; had worked his way back to London, where he had powerful and rich friends. There was not, as yet, any inquiry after him. But there would be, before long, a hue-and-cry, with a big reward.

These things, I say, were well known to everybody. The man's escape and his safe concealment were his own concern ; the sailors would neither meddle nor make in the matter, nor would the landlord of the tavern ; he cared nothing about the man so long as he paid his way ; but for him to get the credit of treachery and of giving information would be fatal for himself—men have been murdered for less—and for the credit of his house, which might as well be closed. But there was one man—by Christian name I doubt not that he was called Judas—who turned the matter over in his mind. This person, whose sense of honour was imperfect, argued that the reward being open to anyone who gave information was a sign of money waiting, in fact, to be picked up ; that no one need know who laid the information or who took the reward ; that all he had to do was to go to Bow Street, and say, ‘ A convict, named Adolphus Truxo, sent out to the plantations for life, has escaped, and has returned to England, and may be found at a certain tavern at Wapping. He cannot be mistaken, being a huge negro seven feet in height ; he boasts, truthfully or not, that in order to compass his escape he murdered three overseers. He will fight. You must therefore send a large posse of determined men. The reward ? I will call for it when you have effected the capture.’

As it happened, and as you shall hear, he never got

the reward; but, in the meantime, Oliver did not carry Truxo and his wife Doll on board that ship.

First, he found a great crowd, both of men and of women, gathered together in the street before the tavern. They were all violently agitated; the women were talking together, every one as loudly as she could, so as to be heard, if possible, above the rest. The talk was full of allegations, charges, rumours, reports, suspicions, and threatening. Oliver heard broken parts of the exclamations:—

‘They say he’s settled two of the constables at least; two are stone dead; more than two, six at least, are knocked o’ the head, senseless, besides two desperately wounded with broken ribs and arms. He is fighting them all together. He’s a lion, not a man; they have sent to the Tower for soldiers. Where is Doll, his wife? They say that Doll brought in the constables. No, she never did. She’s faithful, is Doll. She is with her man still; she is looking on, and heaving things when she gets a chance; she’s as good as any man. She did sell him. She did not sell him; she is fighting with him; hanging is not good enough for her; she is standing up for her man. He is upstairs in his bedroom. Doll keeps the stairs with the poker. They are going to starve him out; he will set fire to the house; the landlord has run away. The man will be hanged if they take him alive. Shame to hang so proper a man, though black of colour! Who sold him? Who laid information? If we knew we would tear him to pieces; we would knife him; we would tear him with our very finger-nails. Wretch! villain! Lord save and protect us from all informers!’

And so on with contradicting statements, but all tending to show that a fight was going on, and that Mr.

Adolphus Truxo was defending himself valiantly against the officers of justice.

As for the men, they stood about in groups; they whispered each other; they looked dangerous. It was evident that they were thinking of a rescue. To a man of less courage than Oliver the situation was dangerous in the extreme, because a crowd is always suspicious and he was a stranger. Fortunately, no one noticed him. Stranger or not, Oliver scorned to show any fear. He pushed through the crowd to the front.

At this moment the man of whom they were speaking appeared at his window, that of the first floor. He threw open the casement and stood before them all, foaming at the mouth and roaring without words, like a bull at bay; he was a proper man indeed, if to be so tall and of such immense strength makes a man proper. His rough waistcoat had been torn open in a recent encounter; he had no coat, his broad square shoulders and his deep chest were partly exposed; it was surely impossible for a man to look stronger or more terrible than this black warrior driven to bay and fighting for his life. One understood by the look of the man's face that he would not be taken alive, and it was not apparent how a posse of constables armed only with staves could kill him.

He had a wound of some kind on his face, and the red blood was trickling down his cheek; his fierce eyes flamed like those of a wild beast in wrath; he bellowed, looking down upon the people below, with rage inarticulate. There was no longer the least touch of terror in the man: while he sat alone in his bedroom and thought of what might happen, and of that accursed prison, he might tremble with fear; once face to face with the danger, all the brute surged upwards in him, with the courage of the bull or that

of the African lion, and with the fierce lust of fight and the joy of battle. Such he must have looked when, to procure his freedom, he fought and slew the overseers in the plantation of Virginia.

Oliver looked on from the fore-front of the crowd ; he could not choose but regard the brave creature with admiration, as he made one more, and the last, fight for escape. He also perceived at once that unless the people of the crowd attempted a rescue, there was no hope for the man. At a word the crowd would have followed Oliver, or any other who offered to lead. But he had the prudence to keep quiet. The posse that had been brought out against the negro consisted of twenty men ; they were armed with clubs, nothing more than the ordinary staves, but they were a company of picked men who knew that they had come out for rough work. Six of them stood guarding the door of the tavern ; the other fourteen were gathered under the window at which the negro stood defying them. He had no weapon ; he shook his huge fist at them ; he defied them, he cursed them. Within could be heard at intervals the shrill voice of Doll, who guarded the staircase, and tore up the banisters and threw everything she could lay hands upon at the assailants.

Some of the constables showed on their heads and faces the marks of the fight in bruises, wounds, and bleeding places ; these were chiefly due to the defensive efforts of Doll, but they only increased the rage of the men, and their determination to effect an arrest. Should one man and one woman hold out against twenty ? The head constable stood out in front, exhorting the man to come down and to surrender ; but his words were either not heard or were disregarded.

‘Jump down !’ cried the women. ‘Jump on their

heads and make a run for it! Man! it's your only chance. Jump, ye devil, jump!

'Steady, men, steady!' said the leader. 'We are twenty to one. Let him jump. He'll have to jump before long.'

Then a voice was heard from the crowd—the only unfriendly voice:

'Don't knock him over the head. He's a black nigger. You can't hurt his head. Strike at his shins—it's no use to strike at his thick skull. Batter his shins—surround him and all of you together batter his shins!'

The speaker was a sailor—mate of a West African trader—one of those who deal in black flesh, and regard a negro with contempt—a slave who must be lashed if he is refractory, and kicked till he is humble.

The prisoner in the bedroom still looked out, hesitating; fourteen constables were stationed below him. Should he jump down upon all their heads?

'Jump—Lord love ye!' cried the women. 'Drop down. It's nothing. You won't hurt yourself. Jump! Jump, ye fool! Jump, and run for it!'

The men of the crowd made a movement; they drew together; they looked dangerous.

The casement window was narrow for a man of the negro's bulk, but he was able to get his legs through, and with a little squeezing his body followed after; then, for a moment, he hung clinging by one hand to the window-sill, his feet no more than three or four feet from the ground, and his back to the wall. Had he dropped immediately he might have escaped—at least, a rescue might have been attempted. But he hesitated; he hung by the window-sill for half a minute in apparent uncertainty, and the men of the crowd who might have made a rush waited, looking on. As has been said, had there been a leader among



CLINGING BY ONE HAND TO THE WINDOW-SILL.

them to give the word, the end might have been different. But they waited for the word and the lead, and they waited too long.

At that moment one of the constables, mindful of the exhortation to strike at the shins, swung round his club and brought it down upon the negro's shins, which are, as is well known, like the heel of Achilles, being the most vulnerable part of his frame. They might have battered at his skull in vain, but the shin—the shin; it is a negro's most tender part. The man dropped on the ground with a yell of agony; he fell headlong in a heap; he strove to rise, but his enemies were upon him. He received, without an attempt, for the moment, to defend himself, all the clubs upon his head; they had no effect upon him; he was waiting to recover from the blow upon his shins. He was about to make one more effort, when one among them—was it one of the constables? but a constable is not armed with a sword—ran upon him with that weapon and drove it through his ribs from behind. One knows not who did the thing; in the confusion the man who did it escaped notice. It was perhaps the mate who gave the advice about the negro's shins.

The negro raised his arms; he sprang to his feet with a hoarse roar, and he fell down dead.

The man had come to the end of his tether. For such an one he had enjoyed a long rope, and had been allowed to commit many crimes. But the Fates do not grant more than a certain period of lawlessness; it is sometimes short and sometimes long; it comes to an end soon or late. This man was a murderer, a housebreaker, a shoplifter, a highway robber, a footpad; there was no kind of crime that he had not committed joyfully and eagerly; he had set before himself as an imaginary hero one who broke all

the laws. Then the Fates at last interfered ; the thread was cut.

‘Who done it?’ asked the constable, looking round—
‘who done it?’

Nobody answered ; nobody knew. There was no one standing by with a sword in his hand.

‘Well, the man’s dead ; if we hadn’t killed him, he would have killed us. Who done it, though?’

* * * * *

The constables gathered together ; the fight was over ; at their feet prone lay the body of the man they had come out to take. The honour of a constable is concerned with a successful capture. At the same time, the men of the posse were perhaps pleased that a man of so much courage and such vast strength should have failed in his last struggle and so should have cheated the gallows.

* * * * *

There came running out of the door none other than Doll, his poor faithful wife, battered and beaten by her husband’s brutality, yet, womanlike, fighting for him and loving him to the end. With a shriek she threw herself upon the dead body.

‘’Tis his wife,’ said the women among themselves. They were whispering now, awestruck in the presence of Death. ‘Look at her. They call her Doll. She married him five or six years ago ; you remember. We laughed at her because she had got a black man. He was a good husband to her when he was at home, except for a black eye now and again, and a kick maybe, and sometimes a turn of the strap. What odds for a black eye with such a husband as that?’

They carried the body into the house and upstairs to the room where he had slept. Doll followed with despair

in her face. Then the constables marched away in silence. The landlord, who had not run away as reported, but was waiting the event in the kitchen, prepared for the coroner's inquest, which would be a thirsty job ; and the crowd dispersed, the women still chattering and the men downcast and reproachful. They ought, it was felt, to have rescued so brave and strong a victim of the law.

Oliver attended the inquest, standing modestly at the door. The coroner and the jury viewed the body. They took the landlord's evidence. The man and his wife had come to his house some days before. They had money, and they took a room—the room which the jury had seen ; they paid for the room and for the food and drink which they ordered. They were free with their money. The man never told the landlord what was his trade or anything about himself. For his own part, so long as his customers paid their way and behaved quiet and reasonable he asked no questions ; the company that used his house was most respectable ; they found the man friendly and pleasant. That was enough for him. When the constables came to arrest him, Truxo was down below, by himself, except for his wife. He fought the whole posse, having for weapon nothing but a chair, which he soon reduced to a leg ; being overpowered by numbers, he escaped up the stairs and barricaded the door ; he got out of the window and was set upon by the constables. Some one in the crowd—some person unknown—who had a sword, drew it and ran it through a vital part.

The head constable also gave evidence. Information had been received that a certain man, a housebreaker, had escaped from the plantations of Virginia, whither he had been transported for life : the man's name was Truxo ; he was a negro who had been sentenced to death, but his

sentence was commuted. The constable was ordered to summon a posse and to arrest the man; he brought twenty constables with him; there was a fight; the man threatened to murder everybody; the fight was terminated by a sword-thrust which killed the man and prevented further mischief and the probable loss of life. Had he been arrested he would have been hanged most certainly. Runaway cases were never pardoned; a man may have one chance but not more.

The coroner summed up. The jury found that the man had met with his death in the course of resistance to the law, and that it was justifiable homicide. So all was over; the jury went away. Oliver felt sorry for the fate of the man, who was, after all, in spite of his daring and his strength, a mere criminal, unworthy of pity; then, he too came away. There was nothing more to be done. Truxo was dead; he had certainly left no papers behind; his widow knew nothing, or remembered nothing, of the events of the Fleet marriage; there was no cause to fear her; she would make a living somehow or other—how do such women make a living?

He did not think it necessary to communicate the sad intelligence to the captain of the ship; the officer had lost his passenger, but was the richer by his passenger's pay.

Oliver went back to Drury Lane and put off his disguise. 'I shall not want it any more,' he said. 'My business is ended.'

CHAPTER XXVI

‘REMEMBER NOT PAST YEARS’

OLIVER’S task was done. Isabel was safe. No charge could now be brought against her. The bridegroom in that terrible marriage was silenced by death; the man of revenge was silenced by drink and seclusion; the Fleet parson was dead, his registers were destroyed; the dress-maker was a woman of many secrets, all of which were safe with her, provided she had her ladies’ custom. Lord Stratherrick could do nothing but repeat what he had heard, but his silence had been bought, and that in the most friendly manner possible. The landlord of the Grapes had no purpose to gain by repeating a rumour of which he had no proof. His silence, too, had been bought. The lady’s reputation, in a word, was saved. It only remained to communicate to her the news that the business was now concluded, and the past buried, and that, as far as could be predicted, it would never be remembered or revived.

Oliver sighed as he thought of the reward that might be offered him. He recalled Alice’s warning that Isabel regarded him in a way which he could not return. For now, in the first flow of gratitude, words might be said, a reward might be offered, which, in common gratitude for all Isabel had done for him, he could not refuse. He

owed everything to her—his freedom, his good name, his present prospects, his hopes, his ambitions. He repeated to himself that she had found him in the deepest distress, and had taken him out of his misery. He had no right to entertain even the thought of any other woman, if this woman should haply claim more than gratitude, more than friendship.

Isabel was in her parlour, the room at the back on the ground-floor—her own room, where she sat when she was alone, surrounded by her books and her pictures. She looked up, when Oliver appeared, with an inquiring glance.

‘Madam,’ he said, ‘I bring you what, I hope, you will consider the best possible news.’

‘You always bring me good news, Oliver. You have prepared me for it. Tell me quickly what your news is. You have concluded the whole matter? I am still more anxious than I can tell you. Oh! you have done so much. But there are many slips possible.’

‘Providence, madam, has been all along on your side—may I say on our side?’

‘Surely you may say so. But how?’

‘Your enemies are finally scattered. You will hear no more of them.’

‘What have you done? Has that man gone away at last?’

‘Madam, it is not what I have done. It is surely the hand of the Lord. You were in the hands of wicked men. They are silenced and powerless. As for the escaped convict——’

He paused, thinking how best to present the story of the last scene.

‘Have you seen him safely on board? Has the ship sailed?’

‘He has gone, madam,’ Oliver replied solemnly. ‘He has gone, but not on the ship provided for him. *Dis aliter visum* : by the gods the end was otherwise appointed. He has embarked on the ship whose pilot is Charon. Someone—believe me, madam, not myself—betrayed him to the hands of justice as an escaped convict. The constables were sent out in force to arrest him. He fought them, being a fellow of infinite courage, and well-nigh escaped them, for the moment ; but in the fight someone, I know not who—not myself—drew a sword, and so he fell. He was a murderer, a robber, the companion of murderers and robbers, and he has surely met with the death that he deserved. But not—not, madam—at my hands.’

Isabel sighed, but not with grief.

‘He is dead—you say that he is dead. Poor wretch ! I cannot choose but feel relieved. You think that he has left nothing—no papers of any kind—behind him ?’

‘What papers could such a man possess, or leave, who knew not how to read or write ? He has left nothing—neither papers, nor record, nor history. He has descended into the silent grave ; his place knoweth him no more. The waters of oblivion have closed over his head. Well for him that he has perished in this way instead of the way he feared and deserved.’

Isabel bowed her head.

‘Can I pretend to be sorry ?’ she asked. ‘If we may not desire the death of a sinner, we may, at least, acknowledge the hand of Providence when a sinner is cut down. It might have been myself, Oliver. What else have I deserved ? And can I ever forget that I once held that man’s hand while the parson declared that those whom God had joined together man must not part ?’

‘Dear lady, that was no marriage. He was already married.’

‘It was a marriage in my own mind; all the guilt of such a marriage is mine; it was in my intention. I can never forget the shame and the humiliation of it.’

‘Let the memory of the day and the hour perish. Dear madam, forget the man and the incident. As for the other: the poor drunkard who in his sober moments talked of revenge, who pretended that you made him bankrupt——’

‘What of him? Have you provided for his comfort—his maintenance? Remember he is Alice’s father.’

‘You know that he is in the King’s Bench Prison. He is now submissive and repentant—that is, afraid he will get no more drink. I have ventured to pledge your word for a small allowance, which will give him a sufficiency. It is the best place for him, believe me. At the tavern where he lived he drank all day long. He would have been killed in a few days or weeks. Already he had begun to see rats and creeping things, which is the worst sign in the world. He will live a little longer in the prison; if it is worth while to prolong a useless life, in the hope of repentance, which, I think, seldom comes to a drunkard. But he has had a fright; he will never again talk of revenge. If he again forgets what he has once endured and talks at random, he knows that he will have to return to misery; he will have to go back to the Poor side, where there is no drink to be obtained except for money, and he will have no money.’

‘I must tell his wife and Alice where he is. Oliver, it was my sin that found me out when this man was taken to my brother-in-law with his story and his lamentations. He goes into a prison where he will die—a pauper. I

remain outside, free and rich. What have I done that I should escape, while he is condemned?’

‘Madam, you have done many kind and good actions. These are your guardian angels; they stand between you and evil; they are your atonement. That man’s life has been a long course of drink, with the evils that drink brings with it. Do not waste your pity upon him.’

‘I will not. Poor wretch!’ Yet she was wasting pity upon him. ‘Perhaps his wife will go to see him.’

‘There remained the Fleet parson. Madam, you will not be surprised to hear, perhaps, that shortly after you saw him this worthy divine went to bed drunk; it was not, I believe, an uncommon ending of the day with him; the candle set fire to the sheets, and in the extinguishing that followed, not only his life was lost, but his latest book of registers was also burned irrecoverably. Madam, said I not that Providence was on your side? *Afflavit Deus*. The Lord hath once breathed, and your enemies are scattered.’

‘The Lord hath sent me also a faithful and most loyal friend.’ She gave him her hand. He stooped and kissed it. She took his hand in her own and held it. He changed colour, thinking of what might be in her mind. Then she said softly: ‘Henceforth you are my brother. Do you understand?—my brother.’

Alas! Oliver would never understand what she resigned, what it cost her to confer this title upon him. He only thought that Alice had been mistaken.

‘My brother,’ she repeated. They were, he thought, tears of relief—say of gratitude—for her release. But they were not; they were the tears which she could not choose but offer when she made surrender, once for all, of the dream that had filled her soul until it became a part

and parcel of her life, insomuch that without it there seemed no joy, or hope of joy, left at all. 'All that I have is yours. Promise me that if you want anything that I can give, you will tell me. It will be my happiness—my chief happiness, my brother—to watch your happiness.' To promote this she was giving up to this loyal and true gentleman the bond which would have made him her own for life. 'But who am I? What can I do for a man like you? I cannot help you. Wealth, honour, rank, office—all will be won by yourself for yourself. We women can only look on. There is a great future before you. And I shall sit and watch and thank God—yes, Oliver, thank God—all my life for you and for your success.'

She retained his hand; he saw the tears rise to her eyes and roll down her cheek. He stood before her too deeply moved for speech, too deeply moved even to kiss her hand. At length he found words.

'Madam, remember what I owe you. Think what you have done for me. Could I do anything—think of anything—while there was a service left undone for you?'

'Nay, but you make too much of a simple act.' She dried her tears. 'Oliver,' she said, 'there is one thing that I must do for you. Oh! one thing that I must do—and that to-night—immediately.'

'What is that, madam?'

'It is the thing that is dearest in your thoughts, and lies nearest to your heart. Oh! Oliver, you have preserved my reputation. Indeed, I think you cannot know how great a thing you have done for me. My sin—my grievous sin—found me out and followed me even to this place where I thought myself secure. I was threatened as you know. Those who threatened me were ruthless. They wanted to rob me of all, and to tear from me my

good name. Alas ! Heaven knows that I had deserved all—all—all. But you, O best of friends—you saved me ! Oliver ! once more—what is the thing that is nearest to your heart ?

‘Madam,’ he stammered, ‘what should it be but my ambition and my hopes ?’

‘I do not mean your ambition. I said your heart, Oliver, not your head.’

‘Can it be other than the continuance of your friendship and my service ?’

‘That is still your head. I said your heart, Oliver—your heart. Answer me faithfully, my brother.’

‘Madam, what am I to say ? You know not what you ask.’

‘You think so ? You shall see. Tell Alice that I would speak to her. Will you ring the bell ?’

He pulled the bell-rope.

‘Child,’ said Isabel, when Alice appeared, ‘we want your help. No one can put us right except yourself. I have asked Oliver to tell me what is nearest to his heart. Perhaps you know. He seems unable to reply. Will you help him ?’

The girl crimsoned, and then turned pale.

‘Madam,’ she said, ‘how can I know Mr. Macnamara’s heart ?’

‘Little hypocrite ! How badly you play that part ! Why, child, you were never made for an actress. Look at this man : he cannot act a part either. Look at him ! And he is a barrister ! He has no words of reply to a simple question. Well, there is no one who knows Oliver’s heart better than yourself. For you have betrayed yourself. It was on the night of the thunderstorm. I was sitting here, and voices—your voices—came up to my

open window from the garden. Alice, my dear, they were the voices of you and Oliver. I heard what you were saying. Shall I relate those words ?

‘No !—no—no—madam.’

‘Then, Alice, you must help me. I have asked Oliver to tell me what is nearest to his heart. He seems unable to reply. This eloquent lawyer can move a jury, but he cannot move himself. Will you help him ?’

The girl crimsoned, and then turned pale.

‘Madam,’ she stammered, and then, like her lover, she remained silent.

‘I am a woman, Alice ; therefore I have eyes to see. I am not like those foolish men, who see nothing and understand nothing. Do you believe that I have not observed certain looks—of the kind called betraying looks—in Oliver’s eyes ? Do you believe that I have forgotten your words ? Ah, Alice ! for loyalty and love, where is thy equal if it be not thy lover ? Tell me honestly, what is nearest to his heart ?’

Then Oliver took the girl’s hand, and made answer.

‘Madam, let me answer for Alice. I have ventured to love this maiden.’

‘Why—there ! there ! Alice, do you hear ? He repeats what he told you in the garden. But I forbid you to repeat what you said.’

‘Madam !’

‘He dares to say that he loves you. Why, Alice, your lover has consigned your father to a debtors’ prison. Can you forgive him ? He will be a prisoner for life ; we shall not, to be sure, starve him. But—can you forgive him ?’

‘Madam, my father is—what you know. Oliver could not commit an act that was cruel or unjust, or do anything but what was right and honourable.’

‘But consider, wilful girl, Oliver has his name and fame to make. Would you hamper him at the outset?’

‘Madam, he has done me the honour to say that he loves me. I will not hamper him. . . . I will let him go free from my promise. It is enough that I have heard him say once that he loves me.’

‘After all,’ said Isabel, laughing through her tears, ‘you are a pair of fools. You think that you can live on words and vows and poetry and promises and hopes. It is like living on air instead of mutton-chops. Let me advise; let me provide. Alice, my dear, take his hand. Child, you blush and tremble. See—men have no shame—he takes your hand without a thought of trembling. You will marry him to-morrow morning, or the day after, or when you choose. The sooner the better. Alice, my dear, Oliver has become my brother—you are my brother, Oliver, are you not?’

‘Madam—you say so.’

‘Therefore, Alice, you will be my sister. It is a tender relation, child’—for Alice burst into tears and fell at her feet—‘it is duty; it is gratitude; it is atonement. For oh, my dear! my dear! if my sin has found me out, the Lord has granted forgiveness. Ah, dear Lord!’—she clasped her hands—‘in mercy Thou rememberest not past years.’

THE END



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